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ANNE
BRONTË
THE TENANT OF
WILDFELL HALL

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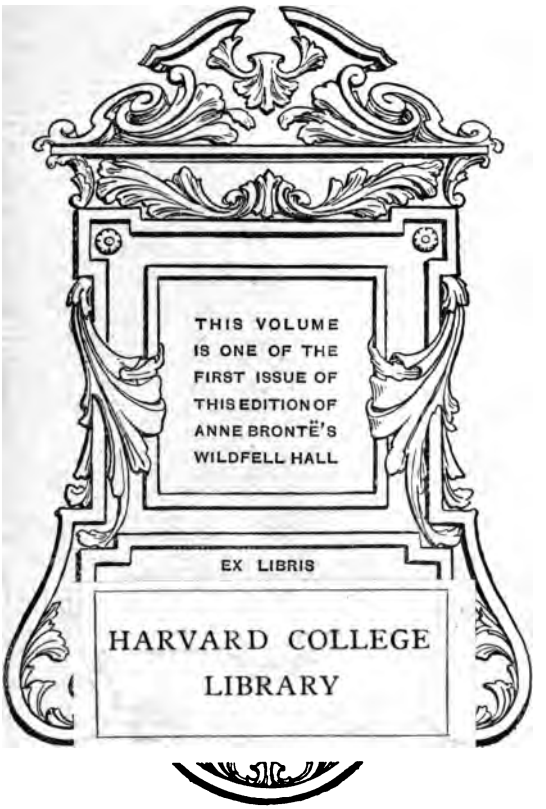
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THE
WORKS OF
CHARLOTTE
EMILY AND ANNE
BRONTË

IN TWELVE VOLUMES

VOL. XI.

THE
TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL
VOL. I.

ACTON BELL
(ANNE BRONTË)

Walter L. Wells, Pk. Sc.

What did you come for?

THE
TENANT
OF
WILDFELL
HALL.
VOL. I.
ANNE BRONTË
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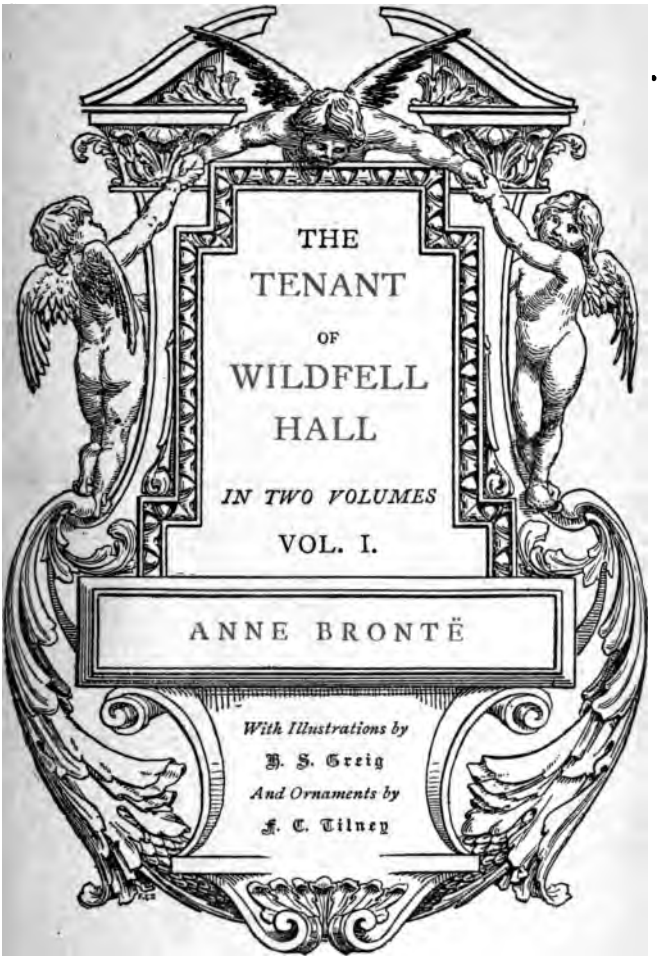

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Prof. Leonard Ogden

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

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NOTE.

IN Charlotte Brontë's biographical notice of her sisters prefixed to *Wuthering Heights* as much is said of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as comes within the scope of this edition; there remains, therefore, but to add the list of the principal editions.

THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL, 3 vols. 8vo. 1848.
——— second edition. 3 vols. 8vo. 1848.
——— another edition. 1 vol. 16mo. 1854.
——— another edition (Vol. VI. of "Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and her sisters," 7 vols.), illustrated. 8vo. 1872.
——— another edition (Vol. VI. of "Life and Works of Charlotte Brontë and her Sisters," 7 vols.), 18mo. 1888.

F. J. S.

THE

TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL.

—o—

Chapter 1.

YOU must go back with me to the autumn of 1827. My father, as you know, was a sort of gentleman farmer in ——shire; and I, by his express desire, succeeded him in the same quiet occupation, not very willingly, for ambition urged me to higher aims, and self-conceit assured me that, in disregarding its voice, I was burying my talent in the earth, and hiding my light under a bushel. My mother had done her utmost to persuade me that I was capable of great achievements; but my father, who thought ambition was the surest road to ruin, and change but another word for destruction, would listen to no scheme for bettering either my own condition, or that of my fellow mortals. He assured me it was all rubbish, and exhorted me, with his dying breath, to continue in the good old way, to follow his steps, and those of his father before him, and let my highest ambition be, to walk honestly through the world, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, and to transmit the paternal

acres to my children in, at least, as flourishing a condition as he left them to me.

"Well!—an honest and industrious farmer is one of the most useful members of society; and if I devote my talents to the cultivation of my farm, and the improvement of agriculture in general, I shall thereby benefit, not only my own immediate connections and dependants, but, in some degree, mankind at large:—hence I shall not have lived in vain."

With such reflections as these, I was endeavouring to console myself, as I plodded home from the fields, one cold, damp, cloudy evening towards the close of October. But the gleam of a bright red fire through the parlour window had more effect in cheering my spirits, and rebuking my thankless repinings, than all the sage reflections and good resolutions I had forced my mind to frame; for I was young then, remember—only four and twenty—and had not acquired half the rule over my own spirit, that I now possess—trifling as that may be.

However, that haven of bliss must not be entered till I had exchanged my miry boots for a clean pair of shoes, and my rough surtout for a respectable coat, and made myself generally presentable before decent society; for my mother, with all her kindness, was vastly particular on certain points.

In ascending to my room, I was met upon the stairs by a smart, pretty girl of nineteen, with a tidy, dumpy figure, a round face, bright, blooming cheeks, glossy, clustering curls, and little merry brown eyes. I need not tell you this was my sister Rose. She is, I know, a comely matron still, and, doubtless, no less lovely—in your eyes—than on the happy day you first beheld her. Nothing told me then, that she, a few years hence, would be the wife of one entirely unknown to me as yet, but destined, hereafter, to become a closer friend

than even herself, more intimate than that unmannerly lad of seventeen, by whom I was collared in the passage, on coming down, and well-nigh jerked off my equilibrium, and who, in correction for his impudence, received a resounding whack over the sconce, which, however, sustained no serious injury from the infliction; as, besides being more than commonly thick, it was protected by a redundant shock of short, reddish curls, that my mother called auburn.

On entering the parlour, we found that honoured lady seated in her arm-chair at the fireside, working away at her knitting, according to her usual custom, when she had nothing else to do. She had swept the hearth, and made a bright blazing fire for our reception; the servant had just brought in the tea-tray; and Rose was producing the sugar-basin and tea-caddy, from the cupboard in the black, oak sideboard, that shone like polished ebony, in the cheerful parlour twilight.

"Well! here they both are," cried my mother, looking round upon us without retarding the motion of her nimble fingers, and glittering needles. "Now shut the door, and come to the fire, while Rose gets the tea ready; I'm sure you must be starved;—and tell me what you've been about all day;—I like to know what my children have been about."

"I've been breaking in the grey colt—no easy business that—directing the ploughing of the last wheat stubble—for the ploughboy has not the sense to direct himself—and carrying out a plan for the extensive and efficient draining of the low meadow-lands."

"That's my brave boy!—and Fergus—what have you been doing?"

"Badger-baiting."

And here he proceeded to give a particular account of his sport, and the respective traits of prowess evinced by the badger and the dogs; my mother pretending to

listen with deep attention, and watching his animated countenance with a degree of maternal admiration I thought highly disproportioned to its object.

"It's time you should be doing something else, Fergus," said I, as soon as a momentary pause in his narration allowed me to get in a word.

"What can I do?" replied he; "my mother won't let me go to sea or enter the army; and I'm determined to do nothing else—except make myself such a nuisance to you all, that you will be thankful to get rid of me on any terms."

Our parent soothingly stroked his stiff, short curls. He growled, and tried to look sulky, and then we all took our seats at the table, in obedience to the thrice-repeated summons of Rose.

"Now take your tea," said she; "and I'll tell you what I've been doing. I've been to call on the Wilsons; and it's a thousand pities you didn't go with me, Gilbert, for Eliza Millward was there!"

"Well! what of her?"

"Oh, nothing!—I'm not going to tell you about her;—only that she's a nice, amusing little thing, when she is in a merry humour, and I shouldn't mind calling her"——

"Hush, hush, my dear! your brother has no such idea!" whispered my mother earnestly, holding up her finger.

"Well," resumed Rose; "I was going to tell you an important piece of news I heard there—I've been bursting with it ever since. You know it was reported a month ago, that somebody was going to take Wildfell Hall—and—what do you think? It has actually been inhabited above a week!—and we never knew!"

"Impossible!" cried my mother.

"Preposterous!!!" shrieked Fergus.

"It has indeed!—and by a single lady!"

"Good gracious, my dear! The place is in ruins!"

"She has had two or three rooms made habitable; and there she lives, all alone—except an old woman for a servant!"

"Oh dear!—that spoils it—I'd hoped she was a witch," observed Fergus, while carving his inch-thick slice of bread and butter.

"Nonsense, Fergus! But isn't it strange, mamma?"

"Strange! I can hardly believe it."

"But you may believe it; for Jane Wilson has seen her. She went with her mother, who, of course, when she heard of a stranger being in the neighbourhood, would be on pins and needles till she had seen her and got all she could out of her. She is called Mrs Graham, and she is in mourning—not widow's weeds, but slightish mourning—and she is quite young, they say,—not above five or six and twenty,—but so reserved! They tried all they could to find out who she was, and where she came from, and all about her, but neither Mrs Wilson, with her pertinacious and impertinent home-thrusts, nor Miss Wilson, with her skilful manœuvring, could manage to elicit a single satisfactory answer, or even a casual remark, or chance expression calculated to allay their curiosity, or throw the faintest ray of light upon her history, circumstances, or connections. Moreover, she was barely civil to them, and evidently better pleased to say 'good-bye,' than 'how do you do.' But Eliza Millward says her father intends to call upon her soon, to offer some pastoral advice, which he fears she needs, as, though she is known to have entered the neighbourhood early last week, she did not make her appearance at church on Sunday; and she—Eliza, that is—will beg to accompany him, and is sure she can succeed in wheedling something out of her—you know, Gilbert,

she can do anything. And we should call some time, mamma; it's only proper, you know."

"Of course, my dear. Poor thing! how lonely she must feel!"

"And pray, be quick about it; and mind you bring me word how much sugar she puts in her tea, and what sort of caps and aprons she wears, and all about it; for I don't know how I can live till I know," said Fergus, very gravely.

But if he intended the speech to be hailed as a master-stroke of wit, he signally failed, for nobody laughed. However, he was not much disconcerted at that; for when he had taken a mouthful of bread and butter, and was about to swallow a gulp of tea, the humour of the thing burst upon him with such irresistible force, that he was obliged to jump up from the table, and rush snorting and choking from the room: and a minute after, was heard screaming in fearful agony in the garden.

As for me, I was hungry, and contented myself with silently demolishing the tea, ham, and toast, while my mother and sister went on talking, and continued to discuss the apparent or non-apparent circumstances, and probable or improbable history of the mysterious lady; but I must confess that, after my brother's misadventure I once or twice raised the cup to my lips, and put it down again without daring to taste the contents, lest I should injure my dignity by a similar explosion.

The next day, my mother and Rose hastened to pay their compliments to the fair recluse; and came back but little wiser than they went; though my mother declared she did not regret the journey, for if she had not gained much good, she flattered herself she had imparted some, and that was better: she had given some useful advice, which, she hoped, would not be thrown away; for Mrs Graham, though she said little to any

purpose, and appeared somewhat self-opinionated, seemed not incapable of reflection,—though she did not know where she had been all her life, poor thing, for she betrayed a lamentable ignorance on certain points, and had not even the sense to be ashamed of it.

"On what points, mother?" asked I.

"On household matters, and all the little niceties of cookery, and such things, that every lady ought to be familiar with, whether she be required to make a practical use of her knowledge or not. I gave her some useful pieces of information, however, and several excellent receipts, the value of which she evidently could not appreciate, for she begged I would not trouble myself, as she lived in such a plain, quiet way, that she was sure she should never make use of them. 'No matter, my dear,' said I; 'it is what every respectable female ought to know;—and besides, though you are alone now, you will not be always so; you have been married, and probably—I might say almost certainly—will be again.' 'You are mistaken there, ma'am,' said she, almost haughtily; 'I am certain I never shall.'—But I told her I knew better."

"Some romantic young widow, I suppose," said I, "come there to end her days in solitude, and mourn in secret for the dear departed—but it won't last long."

"No, I think not," observed Rose; "for she didn't seem very disconsolate after all; and she's excessively pretty—handsome rather—you must see her, Gilbert; you will call her a perfect beauty, though you could hardly pretend to discover a resemblance between her and Eliza Millward."

"Well, I can imagine many faces more beautiful than Eliza's, though not more charming. I allow she has small claims to perfection; but then, I maintain, that, if she were more perfect, she would be less interesting."

"And so you prefer her faults to other people's perfections?"

"Just so—saving my mother's presence."

"Oh, my dear Gilbert, what nonsense you talk!—I know you don't mean it; it's quite out of the question," said my mother, getting up, and bustling out of the room, under pretence of household business, in order to escape the contradiction that was trembling on my tongue.

After that, Rose favoured me with further particulars respecting Mrs Graham. Her appearance, manners, and dress, and the very furniture of the room she inhabited, were all set before me, with rather more clearness and precision than I cared to see them; but, as I was not a very attentive listener, I could not repeat the description if I would.

The next day was Saturday; and, on Sunday, everybody wondered whether or not the fair unknown would profit by the vicar's remonstrance, and come to church. I confess, I looked with some interest myself towards the old family pew, appertaining to Wildfell Hall, where the faded crimson cushions and lining had been unpressed and unrenewed so many years, and the grim escutcheons, with their lugubrious borders of rusty black cloth, frowned so sternly from the wall above.

And there I beheld a tall, lady-like figure, clad in black. Her face was towards me, and there was something in it, which, once seen, invited me to look again. Her hair was raven black, and disposed in long glossy ringlets, a style of coiffure rather unusual in those days, but always graceful and becoming; her complexion was clear and pale; her eyes I could not see, for being bent upon her prayer-book they were concealed by their drooping lids and long black lashes, but the brows above were expressive and well defined; the forehead was lofty and intellectual, the nose a perfect aquiline, and

the features in general unexceptionable—only there was a slight hollowness about the cheeks and eyes, and the lips, though finely formed, were a little too thin, a little too firmly compressed, and had something about them that betokened, I thought, no very soft or amiable temper; and I said in my heart—

"I would rather admire you from this distance, fair lady, than be the partner of your home."

Just then, she happened to raise her eyes, and they met mine; I did not choose to withdraw my gaze, and she turned again to her book, but with a momentary, indefinable expression of quiet scorn, that was inexpressibly provoking to me.

"She thinks me an impudent puppy," thought I. "Humph!—she shall change her mind before long, if I think it worth while."

But then it flashed upon me that these were very improper thoughts for a place of worship, and that my behaviour, on the present occasion, was anything but what it ought to be. Previous, however, to directing my mind to the service, I glanced round the church to see if any one had been observing me;—but no,—all, who were not attending to their prayer books, were attending to the strange lady,—my good mother and sister among the rest, and Mrs Wilson and her daughter; and even Eliza Millward was slily glancing from the corners of her eyes towards the object of general attraction. Then, she glanced at me, simpered a little, and blushed, modestly looked at her prayer-book, and endeavoured to compose her features.

Here I was transgressing again; and this time I was made sensible of it by a sudden dig in the ribs, from the elbow of my pert brother. For the present, I could only resent the insult by pressing my foot upon his toes, deferring further vengeance till we got out of church.

Now, Halford, before I close this letter, I'll tell you who Eliza Millward was; she was the vicar's younger daughter, and a very engaging little creature, for whom I felt no small degree of partiality;—and she knew it, though I had never come to any direct explanation, and had no definite intention of so doing, for my mother, who maintained there was no one good enough for me within twenty miles round, could not bear the thoughts of my marrying that insignificant little thing, who, in addition to her numerous other disqualifications, had not twenty pounds to call her own. Eliza's figure was at once slight and plump, her face small, and nearly as round as my sister's,—complexion something similar to hers, but more delicate and less decidedly blooming, nose, retroussé,—features, generally irregular;—and, altogether, she was rather charming than pretty. But her eyes—I must not forget those remarkable features, for therein her chief attraction lay—in outward aspect at least; they were long and narrow in shape, the irids black, or very dark brown, the expression various, and ever changing, but always either preternaturally—I had almost said diabolically—wicked, or irresistibly bewitching—often both. Her voice was gentle and childish, her tread light and soft as that of a cat;—but her manners more frequently resembled those of a pretty playful kitten, that is now pert and roguish, now timid and demure, according to its own sweet will.

Her sister, Mary, was several years older, several inches taller, and of a larger, coarser build—a plain, quiet, sensible girl, who had patiently nursed their mother through her last long, tedious illness, and been the housekeeper, and family drudge, from thence to the present time. She was trusted and valued by her father, loved and courted by all dogs, cats, children, and poor people, and slighted and neglected by everybody else.

The Reverend Michael Millward, himself, was a

tall, ponderous, elderly gentleman, who placed a shovel-hat above his large, square, massive-featured face, carried a stout walking-stick in his hand, and encased his still powerful limbs in knee-breeches and gaiters,—or black silk stockings on state occasions. He was a man of fixed principles, strong prejudices, and regular habits, intolerant of dissent in any shape, acting under a firm conviction that his opinions were always right, and whoever differed from them must be either most deplorably ignorant, or wilfully blind.

In childhood, I had always been accustomed to regard him with a feeling of reverential awe—but lately, even now, surmounted, for, though he had a fatherly kindness for the well-behaved, he was a strict disciplinarian, and had often sternly reproved our juvenile failings and peccadilloes; and moreover, in those days whenever he called upon our parents, we had to stand up before him, and say our catechism, or repeat "How doth the little busy bee," or some other hymn, or—worse than all—be questioned about his last text, and the heads of the discourse, which we never could remember. Sometimes, the worthy gentleman would reprove my mother for being over-indulgent to her sons, with a reference to old Eli, or David and Absalom, which was particularly galling to her feelings; and, very highly as she respected him, and all his sayings, I once heard her exclaim, "I wish to goodness he had a son himself! He wouldn't be so ready with his advice to other people then;—he'd see what it is to have a couple of boys to keep in order."

He had a laudable care for his own bodily health—kept very early hours, regularly took a walk before breakfast, was vastly particular about warm and dry clothing, had never been known to preach a sermon without previously swallowing a raw egg—albeit he was gifted with good lungs and a powerful voice,—

and was, generally, extremely particular about what he ate and drank, though by no means abstemious, and having a mode of dietary peculiar to himself,—being a great despiser of tea and such slops, and a patron of malt liquors, bacon and eggs, ham, hung beef, and other strong meats, which agreed well enough with his digestive organs, and therefore were maintained by him to be good and wholesome for everybody, and confidently recommended to the most delicate convalescents or dyspeptics, who, if they failed to derive the promised benefit from his prescriptions, were told it was because they had not persevered, and if they complained of inconvenient results therefrom, were assured it was all fancy.

I will just touch upon two other persons whom I have mentioned, and then bring this long letter to a close. These are Mrs Wilson and her daughter. The former was the widow of a substantial farmer, a narrow-minded, tattling old gossip, whose character is not worth describing. She had two sons, Robert, a rough countrified farmer, and Richard, a retiring, studious young man, who was studying the classics with the vicar's assistance, preparing for college, with a view to enter the Church.

Their sister Jane was a young lady of some talents, and more ambition. She had, at her own desire, received a regular boarding-school education, superior to what any member of the family had obtained before. She had taken the polish well, acquired considerable elegance of manners, quite lost her provincial accent, and could boast of more accomplishments than the vicar's daughters. She was considered a beauty besides; but never for a moment could she number me amongst her admirers. She was about six and twenty, rather tall, and very slender, her hair was neither chestnut nor auburn, but a most decided, bright, light red, her com—

plexion was remarkably fair and brilliant, her head small, neck long, chin well turned, but very short, lips thin and red, eyes clear hazel, quick and penetrating, but entirely destitute of poetry or feeling. She had, or might have had, many suitors in her own rank of life, but scornfully repulsed or rejected them all; for none but a gentleman could please her refined taste, and none but a rich one could satisfy her soaring ambition. One gentleman there was, from whom she had lately received some rather pointed attentions, and upon whose heart, name, and fortune, it was whispered, she had serious designs. This was Mr Laurence, the young squire, whose family had formerly occupied Wildfell Hall, but had deserted it, some fifteen years ago, for a more modern and commodious mansion in the neighbouring parish.

Now, Halford, I bid you adieu for the present. This is the first instalment of my debt. If the coin suits you, tell me so, and I'll send you the rest at my leisure: if you would rather remain my creditor than stuff your purse with such ungainly heavy pieces,—tell me still, and I'll pardon your bad taste, and willingly keep the treasure to myself.—Yours, immutably,

GILBERT MARKHAM.

Chapter ij.

I PERCEIVE with joy, my most valued friend, that the cloud of your displeasure has passed away; the light of your countenance blesses me once more, and you desire the continuation of my story; therefore, without more ado, you shall have it.

I think the day I last mentioned was a certain

Sunday, the latest in the October of 1827. On the following Tuesday I was out with my dog and gun, in pursuit of such game as I could find within the territory of Linden-Car; but finding none at all, I turned my arms against the hawks and carrion-crows, whose depredations, as I suspected, had deprived me of better prey. To this end I left the more frequented regions, the wooded valleys, the corn-fields and the meadow-lands, and proceeded to mount the steep acclivity of Wildfell, the wildest and the loftiest eminence in our neighbourhood, where, as you ascend, the hedges, as well as the trees, become scanty and stunted, the former, at length, giving place to rough stone fences, partly greened over with ivy and moss, the latter to larches and Scotch fir-trees, or isolated black-thorns. The fields, being rough and stony, and wholly unfit for the plough, were mostly devoted to the pasturing of sheep and cattle; the soil was thin and poor: bits of grey rock here and there peeped out from the grassy hillocks; bilberry plants and heather—relics of more savage wildness—grew under the walls; and in many of the enclosures, ragweeds and rushes usurped supremacy over the scanty herbage;—but these were not my property.

Near the top of this hill, about two miles from Linden-Car, stood Wildfell Hall, a superannuated mansion of the Elizabethan era, built of dark grey stone,—venerable and picturesque to look at, but, doubtless, cold and gloomy enough to inhabit, with its thick stone mullions and little latticed panes, its time-eaten air-holes, and its too lonely, too unsheltered situation,—only shielded from the war of wind and weather by a group of Scotch firs, themselves half blighted with storms, and looking as stern and gloomy as the Hall itself. Behind it lay a few desolate fields, and then, the brown heath-clad summit of the hill; before it

(enclosed by stone walls, and entered by an iron gate with large balls of grey granite—similar to those which decorated the roof and gables—surmounting the gate-posts) was a garden,—once stocked with such hard plants and flowers as could best brook the soil and climate, and such trees and shrubs as could best endure the gardener's torturing shears, and most readily assume the shapes he chose to give them,—now, having been left so many years, untilled and untrimmed, abandoned to the weeds and the grass, to the frost and the wind, the rain and the drought, it presented a very singular appearance indeed. The close green walls of privet, that had bordered the principal walk, were two-thirds withered away, and the rest grown beyond all reasonable bounds; the old boxwood swan, that sat beside the scraper, had lost its neck and half its body: the castellated towers of laurel in the middle of the garden, the gigantic warrior that stood on one side of the gateway, and the lion that guarded the other, were sprouted into such fantastic shapes as resembled nothing either in heaven or earth, or in the waters under the earth; but, to my young imagination, they presented all of them a goblinish appearance, that harmonised well with the ghostly legends and dark traditions our old nurse had told us respecting the haunted hall and its departed occupants.

I had succeeded in killing a hawk and two crows when I came within sight of the mansion; and then, relinquishing further depredations, I sauntered on, to have a look at the old place, and see what changes had been wrought in it by its new inhabitant. I did not like to go quite to the front and stare in at the gate; but I paused beside the garden wall, and looked, and saw no change—except in one wing, where the broken windows and dilapidated roof had evidently been repaired, and where a thin wreath of smoke was curling up from the stack of chimneys.

While I thus stood, leaning on my gun, and looking up at the dark gables, sunk in an idle reverie, weaving a tissue of wayward fancies, in which old associations and the fair young hermit, now within those walls, bore a nearly equal part, I heard a slight rustling and scrambling just within the garden; and, glancing in the direction whence the sound proceeded, I beheld a tiny hand elevated above the wall: it clung to the topmost stone, and then another little hand was raised to take a firmer hold, and then appeared a small white forehead, surmounted with wreaths of light brown hair, with a pair of deep blue eyes beneath, and the upper portion of a diminutive ivory nose.

The eyes did not notice me, but sparkled with glee on beholding Sancho, my beautiful black and white setter, that was coursing about the field with its muzzle to the ground. The little creature raised its face and called aloud to the dog. The good-natured animal paused, looked up, and wagged his tail, but made no further advances. The child (a little boy, apparently about five years old) scrambled up to the top of the wall and called again and again; but finding this of no avail, apparently made up his mind, like Mahomet, to go to the mountain, since the mountain would not come to him, and attempted to get over; but a crabbed old cherry tree, that grew hard by, caught him by the frock in one of its crooked scraggy arms that stretched over the wall. In attempting to disengage himself, his foot slipped, and down he tumbled—but not to the earth;—the tree still kept him suspended. There was a silent struggle, and then a piercing shriek;—but, in an instant, I had dropped my gun on the grass, and caught the little fellow in my arms.

I wiped his eyes with his frock, told him he was all right, and called Sancho to pacify him. He was just putting his little hand on the dog's neck and beginning

to smile through his tears, when I heard, behind me, a click of the iron gate, and a rustle of female garments, and lo! Mrs Graham darted upon me,—her neck uncovered, her black locks streaming in the wind.

"Give me the child!" she said, in a voice scarce louder than a whisper, but with a tone of startling vehemence, and, seizing the boy, she snatched him from me, as if some dire contamination were in my touch, and then stood with one hand firmly clasping his, the other on his shoulder, fixing upon me her large, luminous, dark eyes—pale, breathless, quivering with agitation.

"I was not harming the child, madam," said I, scarce knowing whether to be most astonished or displeased; "he was tumbling off the wall there; and I was so fortunate as to catch him, while he hung suspended headlong from that tree, and prevent I know not what catastrophe."

"I beg your pardon, sir," stammered she;—suddenly calming down,—the light of reason seeming to break upon her beclouded spirit, and a faint blush mantling on her cheek—"I did not know you;—and I thought"——

She stooped to kiss the child, and fondly clasped her arm round his neck.

"You thought I was going to kidnap your son, I suppose?"

She stroked his head with a half-embarrassed laugh, and replied—

"I did not know he had attempted to climb the wall.—I have the pleasure of addressing Mr Markham, I believe?" she added, somewhat abruptly.

I bowed, but ventured to ask her how she knew me.

"Your sister called here, a few days ago, with Mrs Markham."

"Is the resemblance so strong then?" I asked, in

some surprise, and not so greatly flattered at the idea as I ought to have been.

"There is a likeness about the eyes and complexion, I think," replied she, somewhat dubiously surveying my face:—"and I think I saw you at church on Sunday."

I smiled.—There was something either in that smile or the recollections it awakened that was particularly displeasing to her, for she suddenly assumed again that proud, chilly look that had so unspeakably roused my corruption at church—a look of repellent scorn, so easily assumed, and so entirely without the least distortion of a single feature, that, while there, it seemed like the natural expression of the face, and was the more provoking to me, because I could not think it affected.

"Good morning, Mr Markham," said she; and without another word or glance, she withdrew, with her child, into the garden; and I returned home, angry and dissatisfied—I could scarcely tell you why—and therefore will not attempt it.

I only stayed to put away my gun and powder-horn, and give some requisite directions to one of the farming-men, and then repaired to the vicarage, to solace my spirit and soothe my ruffled temper with the company and conversation of Eliza Millward.

I found her, as usual, busy with some piece of soft embroidery (the mania for Berlin wools had not yet commenced), while her sister was seated at the chimney corner, with the cat on her knee, mending a heap of stockings.

"Mary—Mary put them away!" Eliza was hastily saying just as I entered the room.

"Not I, indeed!" was the phlegmatic reply; and my appearance prevented further discussion.

"You're so unfortunate, Mr Markham!" observed the younger sister, with one of her arch, sidelong glances.

"Papa's just gone out into the parish, and not likely to be back for an hour!"

"Never mind; I can manage to spend a few minutes with his daughters, if they'll allow me," said I, bringing a chair to the fire, and seating myself therein, without waiting to be asked.

"Well, if you'll be very good and amusing, we shall not object."

"Let your permission be unconditional, pray; for I came not to give pleasure, but to seek it," I answered.

However, I thought it but reasonable to make some slight exertion to render my company agreeable; and what little effort I made, was apparently pretty successful, for Miss Eliza was never in a better humour. We seemed, indeed, to be mutually pleased with each other, and managed to maintain between us a cheerful and animated, though not very profound conversation. It was little better than a *tête-à-tête*, for Miss Millward never opened her lips, except occasionally to correct some random assertion or exaggerated expression of her sister's, and once to ask her to pick up the ball of cotton, that had rolled under the table. I did this myself, however, as in duty bound.

"Thank you, Mr Markham," said she, as I presented it to her. "I would have picked it up myself; only I did not want to disturb the cat."

"Mary, dear, that won't excuse you in Mr Markham's eyes," said Eliza; "he hates cats, I dare say, as cordially as he does old maids—like all other gentlemen. Don't you, Mr Markham?"

"I believe it is natural for our unamiable sex to dislike the creatures," replied I: "for you ladies lavish so many caresses upon them."

"Bless them—little darlings!" cried she, in a sudden burst of enthusiasm, turning round, and overwhelming her sister's pet with a shower of kisses.

"Don't Eliza!" said Miss Millward, somewhat gruffly, as she impatiently pushed her away.

But it was time for me to be going: make what haste I would, I should still be too late for tea; and my mother was the soul of order and punctuality.

My fair friend was evidently unwilling to bid me adieu. I tenderly squeezed her little hand at parting; and she repaid me with one of her softest smiles and most bewitching glances. I went home, very happy, with a heart brimful of complacency for myself, and overflowing with love for Eliza.

—o—

Chapter iij.

TWO days after, Mrs Graham called at Linden-Car, contrary to the expectation of Rose, who entertained an idea that the mysterious occupant of Wildfell Hall would wholly disregard the common observances of civilised life,—in which opinion she was supported by the Wilsons, who testified that neither their call nor the Millwards' had been returned as yet. Now, however, the cause of that omission was explained, though not entirely to the satisfaction of Rose. Mrs Graham had brought her child with her, and on my mother's expressing surprise that he could walk so far, she replied—

"It is a long walk for him; but I must have either taken him with me, or relinquished the visit altogether; for I never leave him alone; and I think, Mrs Markham, I must beg you to make my excuses to the Millwards and Mrs Wilson, when you see them, as I fear I cannot do myself the pleasure of calling upon them till my little Arthur is able to accompany me."

"But you have a servant," said Rose; "could you not leave him with her?"

"She has her own occupations to attend to; and, besides, she is too old to run after a child, and he is too mercurial to be tied to an elderly woman."

"But you left him to come to church."

"Yes, once; but I would not have left him for any other purpose; and I think, in future, I must contrive to bring him with me, or stay at home."

"Is he so mischievous?" asked my mother, considerably shocked.

"No," replied the lady, sadly smiling, as she stroked the wavy locks of her son, who was seated on a low stool at her feet, "but he is my only treasure; and I am his only friend, so we don't like to be separated."

"But, my dear, I call that doting," said my plain-spoken parent. "You should try to suppress such foolish fondness, as well to save your son from ruin as yourself from ridicule."

"Ruin! Mrs Markham?"

"Yes; it is spoiling the child. Even at his age, he ought not to be always tied to his mother's apron-string; he should learn to be ashamed of it."

"Mrs Markham, I beg you will not say such things in his presence at least. I trust my son will never be ashamed to love his mother!" said Mrs Graham, with a serious energy that startled the company.

My mother attempted to appease her by an explanation; but she seemed to think enough had been said on the subject, and abruptly turned the conversation.

"Just as I thought," said I to myself: "the lady's temper is none of the mildest, notwithstanding her sweet, pale face and lofty brow, where thought and suffering seem equally to have stamped their impress."

All this time, I was seated at a table on the other

side of the room, apparently immersed in the perusal of a volume of the *Farmer's Magazine*, which I happened to have been reading at the moment of our visitor's arrival; and, not choosing to be over civil, I had merely bowed as she entered, and continued my occupation as before.

In a little while, however, I was sensible that some one was approaching me, with a light, but slow and hesitating tread. It was little Arthur, irresistibly attracted by my dog Sancho, that was lying at my feet. On looking up, I beheld him standing about two yards off, with his clear blue eyes wistfully gazing on the dog, transfixed to the spot, not by fear of the animal, but by a timid disinclination to approach its master. A little encouragement, however, induced him to come forward. The child, though shy, was not sullen. In a minute he was kneeling on the carpet, with his arms round Sancho's neck, and in a minute or two more, the little fellow was seated on my knee, surveying with eager interest the various specimens of horses, cattle, pigs, and model farms portrayed in the volume before me. I glanced at his mother now and then, to see how she relished the new-sprung intimacy; and I saw, by the unquiet aspect of her eye, that for some reason or other she was uneasy at the child's position.

"Arthur," she said, at length, "come here. You are troublesome to Mr Markham: he wishes to read."

"By no means, Mrs Graham; pray let him stay. I am as much amused as he is," pleaded I. But still, with hand and eye, she silently called him to her side.

"No, mamma," said the child; "let me look at these pictures first; and then I'll come, and tell you all about them."

"We are going to have a small party on Monday, the 5th of November," said my mother; "and I hope you will not refuse to make one, Mrs Graham. You

can bring your little boy with you, you know—I dare say we shall be able to amuse him;—and then you can make your own apologies to the Millwards and Wilsons,—they will all be here, I expect."

"Thank you, I never go to parties."

"Oh! but this will be quite a family concern—early hours, and nobody here but ourselves, and just the Millwards and Wilsons, most of whom you already know, and Mr Lawrence, your landlord, with whom you ought to make acquaintance."

"I do know something of him—but you must excuse me this time; for the evenings, now, are dark and damp, and Arthur, I fear, is too delicate to risk exposure to their influence with impunity. We must defer the enjoyment of your hospitality, till the return of longer days and warmer nights."

Rose, now, at a hint from my mother, produced a decanter of wine, with accompaniments of glasses and cake, from the cupboard and the oak sideboard, and the refreshment was duly presented to the guests. They both partook of the cake, but obstinately refused the wine, in spite of their hostess's hospitable attempts to force it upon them. Arthur, especially, shrank from the ruby nectar as if in terror and disgust, and was ready to cry when urged to take it.

"Never mind, Arthur," said his mamma, "Mrs Markham thinks it will do you good, as you were tired with your walk; but she will not oblige you to take it!—I dare say you will do very well without. He detests the very sight of wine," she added, "and the smell of it almost makes him sick. I have been accustomed to make him swallow a little wine or weak spirits-and-water, by way of medicine when he was sick, and, in fact, I have done what I could to make him hate them."

Everybody laughed except the young widow and her son.

"Well, Mrs Graham," said my mother, wiping the tears of merriment from her bright blue eyes—"well, you surprise me! I really gave you credit for having more sense.—The poor child will be the veriest milk-sop that ever was sopped! Only think what a man you will make of him, if you persist in"——

"I think it a very excellent plan," interrupted Mrs Graham with imperturbable gravity. "By that means I hope to save him from one degrading vice at least. I wish I could render the incentives to every other equally innoxious in his case."

"But by such means," said I, "you will never render him virtuous.—What is it that constitutes virtue, Mrs Graham! Is it the circumstance of being able and willing to resist temptation; or that of having no temptations to resist? Is he a strong man that overcomes great obstacles and performs surprising achievements, though by dint of great muscular exertion, and at the risk of some subsequent fatigue, or he that sits in his chair all day, with nothing to do more laborious than stirring the fire, and carrying his food to his mouth? If you would have your son to walk honourably through the world, you must not attempt to clear the stones from his path, but teach him to walk firmly over them—not insist upon leading him by the hand, but let him learn to go alone."

"I will lead him by the hand, Mr Markham, till he has strength to go alone; and I will clear as many stones from his path as I can, and teach him to avoid the rest—or walk firmly over them, as you say;—for when I have done my utmost, in the way of clearance, there will still be plenty left to exercise all the agility, steadiness, and circumspection he will ever have.—It is all very well to talk about noble resistance, and trials of virtue; but for fifty—or five hundred men that have yielded to temptation, show me one that has had virtue

to resist. And why should I take it for granted that my son will be one in a thousand?—and not rather prepare for the worst, and suppose he will be like his—like the rest of mankind, unless I take care to prevent it?"

"You are very complimentary to us all," I observed.

"I know nothing about you—I speak of those I do know—and when I see the whole race of mankind (with a few rare exceptions) stumbling and blundering along the path of life, sinking into every pitfall, and breaking their shins over every impediment that lies in their way, shall I not use all the means in my power to insure for him a smoother and a safer passage."

"Yes, but the surest means will be to endeavour to fortify him against temptation, not to remove it out of his way."

"I will do both, Mr Markham. God knows he will have temptations enough to assail him, both from within and without, when I have done all I can to render vice as uninviting to him, as it is abominable in its own nature—I myself have had, indeed, but few incentives to what the world calls vice, but yet I have experienced temptations and trials of another kind, that have required, on many occasions, more watchfulness and firmness to resist, than I have hitherto been able to muster against them. And this, I believe, is what most others would acknowledge, who are accustomed to reflection, and wishful to strive against their natural corruptions."

"Yes," said my mother, but half apprehending her drift; "but you would not judge of a boy by yourself—and my dear Mrs Graham, let me warn you in good time against the error—the fatal error, I may call it—of taking that boy's education upon yourself. Because you are clever in some things, and well-informed, you may fancy yourself equal to the task; but indeed you

are not; and if you persist in the attempt, believe me you will bitterly repent it when the mischief is done."

"I am to send him to school, I suppose, to learn to despise his mother's authority and affection!" said the lady, with rather a bitter smile.

"Oh, no!—But if you would have a boy to despise his mother, let her keep him at home, and spend her life in petting him up, and slaving to indulge his follies and caprices."

"I perfectly agree with you, Mrs Markham; but nothing can be further from my principles and practice than such criminal weakness as that."

"Well, but you will treat him like a girl—you'll spoil his spirit, and make a mere Miss Nancy of him—you will, indeed, Mrs Graham, whatever you may think. But I'll get Mr Millward to talk to you about it:—he'll tell you the consequences; he'll set it before you as plain as the day;—and tell you what you ought to do, and all about it; and, I don't doubt, he'll be able to convince you in a minute."

"No occasion to trouble the vicar," said Mrs Graham, glancing at me—I suppose I was smiling at my mother's unbounded confidence in that worthy gentleman—"Mr Markham here, thinks his powers of conviction at least equal to Mr Millward's. If I hear not him, neither should I be convinced though one rose from the dead, he would tell you. Well, Mr Markham, you that maintain that a boy should not be shielded from evil, but sent out to battle against it, alone and unassisted—not taught to avoid the snares of life, but boldly to rush into them, or over them, as he may—to seek danger rather than shun it, and feed his virtue by temptation,—would you"——

"I beg your pardon, Mrs Graham—but you get on too fast. I have not yet said that a boy should be taught to rush into the snares of life,—or even wilfully

to seek temptation for the sake of exercising his virtue by overcoming it;—I only say that it is better to arm and strengthen your hero, than to disarm and enfeeble the foe;—and if you were to rear an oak sapling in a hot-house, tending it carefully night and day, and shielding it from every breath of wind, you could not expect it to become a hardy tree, like that which has grown up on the mountain-side, exposed to all the action of the elements, and not even sheltered from the shock of the tempest."

"Granted;—but would you use the same argument with regard to a girl?"

"Certainly not."

No; you would have her to be tenderly and delicately nurtured, like a hot-house plant—taught to cling to others for direction and support, and guarded, as much as possible, from the very knowledge of evil. But will you be so good as to inform me why you make this distinction? Is it that you think she has no virtue?"

"Assuredly not."

"Well, but you affirm that virtue is only elicited by temptation;—and you think that a woman cannot be too little exposed to temptation, or too little acquainted with vice, or anything connected therewith. It must be, either, that you think she is essentially so vicious, or so feeble-minded that she cannot withstand temptation,—and though she may be pure and innocent as long as she is kept in ignorance and restraint, yet, being destitute of real virtue, to teach her how to sin, is at once to make her a sinner, and the greater her knowledge, the wider her liberty, the deeper will be her depravity,—whereas, in the nobler sex, there is a natural tendency to goodness, guarded by a superior fortitude, which, the more it is exercised by trials and dangers, is only the further developed"——

"Heaven forbid that I should think so!" I interrupted her at last.

"Well then, it must be that you think they are both weak and prone to err, and the slightest error, the merest shadow of pollution, will ruin the one, while the character of the other will be strengthened and embellished—his education properly finished by a little practical acquaintance with forbidden things. Such experience, to him (to use a trite simile), will be like the storm to the oak, which, though it may scatter the leaves, and snap the smaller branches, serves but to rivet the roots, and to harden and condense the fibres of the tree. You would have us encourage our sons to prove all things by their own experience, while our daughters must not even profit by the experience of others. Now I would have both so to benefit by the experience of others, and the precepts of a higher authority, that they should know beforehand to refuse the evil and choose the good, and require no experimental proofs to teach them the evil of transgression. I would not send a poor girl into the world, unarmed against her foes, and ignorant of the snares that beset her path; nor would I watch and guard her, till, deprived of self-respect and self-reliance, she lost the power or the will to watch and guard herself;—and as for my son—if I thought he would grow up to be what you call a man of the world—one that has 'seen life,' and glories in his experience, even though he should so far profit by it as to sober down, at length, into a useful and respected member of society—I would rather that he died to-morrow!—rather a thousand times!" she earnestly repeated, pressing her darling to her side and kissing his forehead with intense affection. He had, already, left his new companion, and been standing for some time beside his mother's knee, looking up into her face, and listening in silent wonder to her incomprehensible discourse.

"Well! you ladies must always have the last word, I suppose," said I, observing her rise, and begin to take leave of my mother.

"You may have as many words as you please,—only I can't stay to hear them."

"No: that is the way: you hear just as much of an argument as you please; and the rest may be spoken to the wind."

"If you are anxious to say anything more on the subject," replied she, as she shook hands with Rose, "you must bring your sister to see me some fine day, and I'll listen, as patiently as you could wish, to whatever you please to say. I would rather be lectured by you than the vicar, because I should have less remorse in telling you, at the end of the discourse, that I preserve my own opinion precisely the same as at the beginning—as would be the case, I am persuaded, with regard to either logician."

"Yes, of course," replied I, determined to be as provoking as herself; "for when a lady does consent to listen to an argument against her own opinions, she is always predetermined to withstand it—to listen only with her bodily ears, keeping the mental organs resolutely closed against the strongest reasoning."

"Good morning, Mr Markham," said my fair antagonist, with a pitying smile; and deigning no further rejoinder, she slightly bowed, and was about to withdraw; but her son, with childish impertinence, arrested her by exclaiming—

"Mamma, you have not shaken hands with Mr Markham!"

She laughingly turned round, and held out her hand. I gave it a spiteful squeeze; for I was annoyed at the continual injustice she had done me from the very dawn of our acquaintance. Without knowing anything about my real disposition and principles, she was evidently

prejudiced against me, and seemed bent upon showing me that her opinions respecting me, on every particular, fell far below those I entertained of myself. I was naturally touchy, or it would not have vexed me so much. Perhaps, too, I was a little bit spoiled by my mother and sister, and some other ladies of my acquaintance; and yet I was by no means a fop—of that I am fully convinced, whether you are or not.

——o——

Chapter ib.

OUR party, on the 5th of November, passed off very well, in spite of Mrs Graham's refusal to grace it with her presence. Indeed, it is probable that, had she been there, there would have been less cordiality, freedom, and frolic amongst us than there was without her.

My mother, as usual, was cheerful and chatty, full of activity and good-nature, and only faulty in being too anxious to make her guests happy, thereby forcing several of them to do what their soul abhorred, in the way of eating or drinking, sitting opposite the blazing fire, or talking when they would be silent. Nevertheless, they bore it very well, being all in their holiday humours.

Mr Millward was mighty in important dogmas and sententious jokes, pompous anecdotes and oracular discourses, dealt out for the edification of the whole assembly in general, and of the admiring Mrs Markham, the polite Mr Lawrence, the sedate Mary Millward, the quiet Richard Wilson, and the matter-of-fact Robert, in particular,—as being the most attentive listeners.

Mrs Wilson was more brilliant than ever, with her

budgets of fresh news and old scandal, strung together with trivial questions and remarks, and oft-repeated observations, uttered apparently for the sole purpose of denying a moment's rest to her inexhaustible organs of speech. She had brought her knitting with her, and it seemed as if her tongue had laid a wager with her fingers, to outdo them in swift and ceaseless motion.

Her daughter Jane was, of course, as graceful and elegant, as witty and seductive, as she could possibly manage to be; for here were all the ladies to outshine, and all the gentlemen to charm,—and Mr Lawrence, especially, to capture and subdue. Her little arts to effect his subjugation were too subtle and impalpable to attract my observation; but I thought there was a certain refined affectation of superiority, and an ungenial self-consciousness about her, that negatived all her advantages; and after she was gone, Rose interpreted to me her various looks, words, and actions with a mingled acuteness and asperity that made me wonder, equally, at the lady's artifice and my sister's penetration, and ask myself if she too had an eye to the squire —but never mind, Halford; she had not.

Richard Wilson, Jane's younger brother, sat in a corner, apparently good-tempered, but silent and shy, desirous to escape observation, but willing enough to listen and observe; and although somewhat out of his element, he would have been happy enough in his own quiet way, if my mother could only have let him alone; but in her mistaken kindness, she would keep persecuting him with her attentions—pressing upon him all manner of viands, under the notion that he was too bashful to help himself, and obliging him to shout across the room his monosyllabic replies to the numerous questions and observations by which she vainly attempted to draw him into conversation.

Rose informed me that he never would have favoured

us with his company, but for the importunities of his sister Jane, who was most anxious to show Mr Lawrence that she had at least one brother more gentlemanly and refined than Robert. That worthy individual she had been equally solicitous to keep away; but he affirmed that he saw no reason why he should not enjoy a crack with Markham and the old lady (my mother was not old, really), and bonny Miss Rose and the parson, as well as the best;—and he was in the right of it too. So he talked commonplace with my mother and Rose, and discussed parish affairs with the vicar, farming matters with me, and politics with us both.

Mary Millward was another mute,—not so much tormented with cruel kindness as Dick Wilson, because she had a certain short, decided way of answering and refusing, and was supposed to be rather sullen than diffident. However that might be, she certainly did not give much pleasure to the company;—nor did she appear to derive much from it. Eliza told me she had only come because her father insisted upon it, having taken it into his head that she devoted herself too exclusively to her household duties, to the neglect of such relaxations and innocent enjoyments as were proper to her age and sex. She seemed to be good-humoured enough on the whole. Once or twice she was provoked to laughter by the wit or the merriment of some favoured individual amongst us; and then I observed she sought the eye of Richard Wilson, who sat over against her. As he studied with her father, she had some acquaintance with him, in spite of the retiring habits of both, and I suppose there was a kind of fellow-feeling established between them.

My Eliza was charming beyond description, coquettish without affectation, and evidently more desirous to engage my attention than that of all the room besides. Her delight in having me near her, seated or standing

by her side, whispering in her ear, or pressing her hand in the dance, was plainly legible in her glowing face and heaving bosom, however belied by saucy words and gestures. But I had better hold my tongue: if I boast of these things now, I shall have to blush hereafter.

To proceed, then, with the various individuals of our party; Rose was simple and natural as usual, and full of mirth and vivacity.

Fergus was impertinent and absurd; but his impertinence and folly served to make others laugh, if they did not raise himself in their estimation.

And finally (for I omit myself), Mr Lawrence was gentlemanly and inoffensive to all, and polite to the vicar and the ladies, especially his hostess and her daughter, and Miss Wilson—misguided man; he had not the taste to prefer Eliza Millward. Mr Lawrence and I were on tolerably intimate terms. Essentially of reserved habits, and but seldom quitting the secluded place of his birth, where he had lived in solitary state since the death of his father, he had neither the opportunity nor the inclination for forming many acquaintances; and, of all he had ever known, I (judging by the results) was the companion most agreeable to his taste. I liked the man well enough, but he was too cold, and shy, and self-contained, to obtain my cordial sympathies. A spirit of candour and frankness, when wholly unaccompanied with coarseness, he admired in others, but he could not acquire it himself. His excessive reserve upon all his own concerns was, indeed, provoking and chilly enough; but I forgave it, from a conviction that it originated less in pride and want of confidence in his friends, than in a certain morbid feeling of delicacy, and a peculiar diffidence, that he was sensible of, but wanted energy to overcome. His heart was like a sensitive plant, that opens for a

moment in the sunshine, but curls up and shrinks into itself at the slightest touch of the finger, or the lightest breath of wind. And, upon the whole, our intimacy was rather a mutual predilection than a deep and solid friendship, such as has since arisen between myself and you, Halford, whom, in spite of your occasional crustiness, I can liken to nothing so well as an old coat, unimpeachable in texture, but easy and loose—that has conformed itself to the shape of the wearer, and which he may use as he pleases, without being bothered with the fear of spoiling it;—whereas Mr Lawrence was like a new garment, all very neat and trim to look at, but so tight in the elbows, that you would fear to split the seams by the unrestricted motion of your arms, and so smooth and fine in surface that you scruple to expose it to a single drop of rain.

Soon after the arrival of the guests, my mother mentioned Mrs Graham, regretted she was not there to meet them, and explained to the Millwards and Wilsons the reasons she had given for neglecting to return their calls, hoping they would excuse her, as she was sure she did not mean to be uncivil, and would be glad to see them at any time—

"But she is a very singular lady, Mr Lawrence," added she; "we don't know what to make of her—but I dare say you can tell us something about her, for she is your tenant, you know,—and she said she knew you a little."

All eyes were turned to Mr Lawrence. I thought he looked unnecessarily confused at being so appealed to.

"I, Mrs Markham!" said he; "you are mistaken—I don't—that is—I have seen her, certainly; but I am the last person you should apply to for information respecting Mrs Graham."

He then immediately turned to Rose, and asked her

to favour the company with a song, or a tune on the piano.

"No," said she, "you must ask Miss Wilson: she outshines us all in singing and music too."

Miss Wilson demurred.

"She'll sing readily enough," said Fergus, "if you'll undertake to stand by her, Mr Lawrence, and turn over the leaves for her."

"I shall be most happy to do so, Miss Wilson; will you allow me?"

She bridled her long neck and smiled, and suffered him to lead her to the instrument, where she played and sang, in her very best style, one piece after another, while he stood patiently by, leaning one hand on the back of her chair, and turning over the leaves of her book with the other. Perhaps he was as much charmed with her performance as she was. It was all very fine in its way; but I cannot say that it moved me very deeply. There was plenty of skill and execution, but precious little feeling.

But we had not done with Mrs Graham yet.

"I don't take wine, Mrs Markham," said Mr Millward, upon the introduction of that beverage; "I'll take a little of your home-brewed ale. I always prefer your home-brewed to anything else."

Flattered at this compliment, my mother rang the bell, and a china jug of our best ale was presently brought and set before the worthy gentleman who so well knew how to appreciate its excellences.

"Now THIS is the thing!" cried he, pouring out a glass of the same in a long stream, skilfully directed from the jug to the tumbler, so as to produce much foam without spilling a drop; and, having surveyed it for a moment opposite the candle, he took a deep draught, and then smacked his lips, drew a long breath, and refilled his glass, my mother looking on with the greatest satisfaction.

"There's nothing like this, Mrs Markham!" said he. "I always maintain that there's nothing to compare with your home-brewed ale."

"I'm sure I'm glad you like it, sir. I always look after the brewing myself, as well as the cheese and the butter—I like to have things well done, while we're about it."

"Quite right, Mrs Markham!"

"But then, Mr Millward, you don't think it wrong to take a little wine now and then—or a little spirits either!" said my mother, as she handed a smoking tumbler of gin-and-water to Mrs Wilson, who affirmed that wine sat heavy on her stomach, and whose son Robert was at that moment helping himself to a pretty stiff glass of the same.

"By no means!" replied the oracle, with a Jove-like nod; "these things are all blessings and mercies, if we only knew how to make use of them."

"But Mrs Graham doesn't think so. You shall just hear now what she told us the other day—I told her I'd tell you."

And my mother favoured the company with a particular account of that lady's mistaken ideas and conduct regarding the matter in hand, concluding with, "Now, don't you think it is wrong?"

"Wrong!" repeated the vicar, with more than common solemnity—"criminal, I should say—criminal!—Not only is it making a fool of the boy, but it is despising the gifts of Providence, and teaching him to trample them under his feet."

He then entered more fully into the question, and explained at large the folly and impiety of such a proceeding. My mother heard him with profoundest reverence; and even Mrs Wilson vouchsafed to rest her tongue for a moment, and listen in silence, while she complacently sipped her gin-and-water. Mr Law-

rence sat with his elbow on the table, carelessly playing with his half-empty wine-glass, and covertly smiling to himself.

"But don't you think, Mr Millward," suggested he, when at length that gentleman paused in his discourse, "that when a child may be naturally prone to intemperance—by the fault of its parents or ancestors, for instance—some precautions are advisable?" (Now it was generally believed that Mr Lawrence's father had shortened his days by intemperance.)

"Some precautions, it may be; but temperance, sir, is one thing, and abstinence another."

"But I have heard that, with some persons, temperance—that is, moderation—is almost impossible; and if abstinence be an evil (which some have doubted), no one will deny that excess is a greater. Some parents have entirely prohibited their children from tasting intoxicating liquors; but a parent's authority cannot last for ever: children are naturally prone to hanker after forbidden things; and a child, in such a case, would be likely to have a strong curiosity to taste, and try the effect of what has been so lauded and enjoyed by others, so strictly forbidden to himself—which curiosity would generally be gratified on the first convenient opportunity; and the restraint once broken, serious consequences might ensue. I don't pretend to be a judge of such matters, but it seems to me, that this plan of Mrs Graham's, as you describe it, Mrs Markham, extraordinary as it may be, is not without its advantages; for here you see the child is delivered at once from temptation; he has no secret curiosity, no hankering desire; he is as well acquainted with the tempting liquors as he ever wishes to be; and is thoroughly disgusted with them, without having suffered from their effects."

"And is that right, sir? Have I not proven to you how wrong it is—how contrary to Scripture and to

reason to teach a child to look with contempt and disgust upon the blessings of Providence, instead of to use them aright?"

"You may consider laudanum a blessing of Providence, sir," replied Mr Lawrence, smiling; "and yet, you will allow that most of us had better abstain from it, even in moderation; but," added he, "I would not desire you to follow out my simile too closely—in witness whereof I finish my glass."

"And take another, I hope, Mr Lawrence," said my mother, pushing the bottle towards him.

He politely declined, and pushing his chair a little away from the table, leant back towards me—I was seated a trifle behind, on the sofa beside Eliza Millward—and carelessly asked me if I knew Mrs Graham.

"I have met her once or twice," I replied.

"What do you think of her?"

"I cannot say that I like her much. She is handsome—or rather I should say distinguished and interesting—in her appearance, but by no means amiable—a woman liable to take strong prejudices, I should fancy, and stick to them through thick and thin, twisting everything into conformity with her own preconceived opinions—too hard, too sharp, too bitter for my taste."

He made no reply, but looked down and bit his lip, and shortly after rose and sauntered up to Miss Wilson, as much repelled by me, I fancy, as attracted by her. I scarcely noticed it at the time, but afterwards, I was led to recall this and other trifling facts, of a similar nature, to my remembrance, when—but I must not anticipate.

We wound up the evening with dancing—our worthy pastor thinking it no scandal to be present on the occasion, though one of the village musicians was engaged to direct our evolutions with his violin. But

Mary Millward obstinately refused to join us; and so did Richard Wilson, though my mother earnestly entreated him to do so, and even offered to be his partner.

We managed very well without them, however. With a single set of quadrilles, and several country dances, we carried it on to a pretty late hour; and at length, having called upon our musician to strike up a waltz, I was just about to whirl Eliza round in that delightful dance, accompanied by Lawrence and Jane Wilson, and Fergus and Rose, when Mr Millward interposed with—

"No, no, I don't allow that! Come, it's time to be going home."

"Oh, no, papa!" pleaded Eliza.

"High time, my girl—high time! Moderation in all things, remember! That's the plan—'Let your moderation be known unto all men!'"

But in revenge, I followed Eliza into the dimly-lighted passage, where, under pretence of helping her on with her shawl, I fear I must plead guilty to snatching a kiss behind her father's back, while he was enveloping his throat and chin in the folds of a mighty comforter. But alas! in turning round, there was my mother close beside me. The consequence was, that no sooner were the guests departed, than I was doomed to a very serious remonstrance, which unpleasantly checked the galloping course of my spirits, and made a disagreeable close to the evening.

"My dear Gilbert," said she, "I wish you wouldn't do so! You know how deeply I have your advantage at heart, how I love you and prize you above everything else in the world, and how much I long to see you well settled in life—and how bitterly it would grieve me to see you married to that girl—or any other in the neighbourhood. What you see in her I don't

know. It isn't only the want of money that I think about—nothing of the kind—but there's neither beauty, nor cleverness, nor goodness, nor anything else that's desirable. If you knew your own value, as I do, you wouldn't dream of it. Do wait awhile and see! If you bind yourself to her, you'll repent it all your lifetime when you look round and see how many better there are. Take my word for it, you will."

"Well, mother, do be quiet!—I hate to be lectured! —I'm not going to marry yet, I tell you; but—dear me! mayn't I enjoy myself at all?"

"Yes, my dear boy, but not in that way. Indeed, you shouldn't do such things. You would be wronging the girl, if she were what she ought to be; but I assure you she is as artful a little hussy as anybody need wish to see; and you'll get entangled in her snares before you know where you are. And if you marry her, Gilbert, you'll break my heart!—so there's an end of it."

"Well, don't cry about it, mother," said I, for the tears were gushing from her eyes; "there, let that kiss efface the one I gave Eliza; don't abuse her any more, and set your mind at rest; for I'll promise never—that is, I'll promise to think twice before I take any important step you seriously disapprove of."

So saying, I lighted my candle, and went to bed, considerably quenched in spirit.

Chapter 6.

IT was about the close of the month, that, yielding at length to the urgent importunities of Rose, I accompanied her in a visit to Wildfell Hall. To our surprise we were ushered into a room where the first

object that met the eye was a painter's easel, with a table beside it covered with rolls of canvas, bottles of oil and varnish, palette, brushes, paints, &c. Leaning against the wall were several sketches in various stages of progression, and a few finished paintings—mostly of landscapes and figures.

"I must make you welcome to my studio," said Mrs Graham, "there is no fire in the sitting-room to-day, and it is rather too cold to show you into a place with an empty grate."

And disengaging a couple of chairs from the artistical lumber that usurped them, she bid us be seated, and resumed her place beside the easel—not facing it exactly, but now and then glancing at the picture upon it while she conversed, and giving it an occasional touch with her brush, as if she found it impossible to wean her attention entirely from her occupation to fix it upon her guests. It was a view of Wildfell Hall, as seen at early morning from the field below, rising in dark relief against a sky of clear silvery blue, with a few red streaks on the horizon, faithfully drawn and coloured, and very elegantly and artistically handled.

"I see your heart is in your work, Mrs Graham," observed I: "I must beg you to go on with it; for if you suffer our presence to interrupt you, we shall be constrained to regard ourselves as unwelcome intruders."

"Oh, no!" replied she, throwing her brush on to the table, as if startled into politeness. "I am not so beset with visitors, but that I can readily spare a few minutes to the few that do favour me with their company."

"You have almost completed your painting," said I, approaching to observe it more closely, and surveying it with a greater degree of admiration and delight than I cared to express. "A few more touches in the foreground will finish it, I should think. But why have you called it Fernley Manor, Cumberland, instead of Wild-

fell Hall, ——shire?" I asked, alluding to the name she had traced in small characters at the bottom of the canvas.

But immediately I was sensible of having committed an act of impertinence in so doing; for she coloured and hesitated; but after a moment's pause, with a kind of desperate frankness, she replied—

"Because I have friends—acquaintances at least—in the world, from whom I desire my present abode to be concealed; and as they might see the picture, and might possibly recognise the style, in spite of the false initials I have put in the corner, I take the precaution to give a false name to the place also, in order to put them on a wrong scent, if they should attempt to trace me out by it."

"Then you don't intend to keep the picture?" said I, anxious to say anything to change the subject.

"No; I cannot afford to paint for my own amusement."

"Mamma sends all her pictures to London," said Arthur; "and somebody sells them for her there, and sends us the money."

In looking round upon the other pieces, I remarked a pretty sketch of Lindenhope from the top of the hill; another view of the old hall, basking in the sunny haze of a quiet summer afternoon; and a simple but striking little picture of a child brooding with looks of silent but deep and sorrowful regret, over a handful of withered flowers, with glimpses of dark low hills and autumnal fields behind it, and a dull beclouded sky above.

"You see there is a sad dearth of subjects," observed the fair artist. "I took the old hall once on a moonlight night, and I suppose I must take it again on a snowy winter's day, and then again on a dark cloudy evening; for I really have nothing else to paint. I have been told that you have a fine view of the sea,

somewhere in the neighbourhood—Is it true?—and is it within walking distance?"

"Yes, if you don't object to walking four miles—or nearly so—little short of eight miles, there and back—and over a somewhat rough, fatiguing road."

"In what direction does it lie?"

I described the situation as well as I could, and was entering upon an explanation of the various roads, lanes, and fields to be traversed in order to reach it, the goings straight on, and turnings to the right and to the left, when she checked me with—

"Oh, stop!—don't tell me now: I shall forget every word of your directions before I require them. I shall not think about going till next spring; and then, perhaps, I may trouble you. At present we have the winter before us, and"——

She suddenly paused, with a suppressed exclamation, started up from her seat, and saying, "Excuse me one moment," hurried from the room, and shut the door behind her.

Curious to see what had startled her so, I looked towards the window—for her eyes had been carelessly fixed upon it the moment before—and just beheld the skirts of a man's coat vanishing behind a large holly-bush that stood between the window and the porch.

"It's mamma's friend," said Arthur.

Rose and I looked at each other.

"I don't know what to make of her at all," whispered Rose.

The child looked at her in grave surprise. She straightway began to talk to him on indifferent matters, while I amused myself with looking at the pictures. There was one in an obscure corner that I had not before observed. It was a little child, seated on the grass with its lap full of flowers. The tiny features and

large blue eyes, smiling through a shock of light brown curls, shaken over the forehead as it bent above its treasure, bore sufficient resemblance to those of the young gentleman before me, to proclaim it a portrait of Arthur Graham in his early infancy.

In taking this up to bring it to the light, I discovered another behind it, with its face to the wall. I ventured to take that up too. It was the portrait of a gentleman in the full prime of youthful manhood—handsome enough, and not badly executed, but, if done by the same hand as the others, it was evidently some years before; for there was far more careful minuteness of detail, and less of that freshness of colouring and freedom of handling, that delighted and surprised me in them. Nevertheless, I surveyed it with considerable interest. There was a certain individuality in the features and expression that stamped it, at once, a successful likeness. The bright blue eyes regarded the spectator with a kind of lurking drollery—you almost expected to see them wink; the lips—a little too voluptuously full—seemed ready to break into a smile; the warmly-tinted cheeks were embellished with a luxuriant growth of reddish whiskers; while the bright chestnut hair, clustering in abundant, wavy curls, trespassed too much upon the forehead, and seemed to intimate that the owner thereof was prouder of his beauty than his intellect—as, perhaps, he had reason to be;—and yet he looked no fool.

I had not had the portrait in my hands two minutes before the fair artist returned.

"Only some one come about the pictures," said she, in apology for her abrupt departure. "I told him to wait."

"I fear it will be considered an act of impertinence," said I, "to presume to look at a picture that the artist has turned to the wall; but may I ask"——

"It is an act of very great impertinence, sir; and therefore I beg you will ask nothing about it, for your curiosity will not be gratified," replied she, attempting to cover the tartness of her rebuke with a smile; but I could see, by her flushed cheek and kindling eye, that she was seriously annoyed.

"I was only going to ask if you had painted it yourself," said I, sulkily resigning the picture into her hands; for without a grain of ceremony she took it from me; and quickly restoring it to the dark corner, with its face to the wall, placed the other against it as before, and then turned to me and laughed.

But I was in no humour for jesting. I carelessly turned to the window, and stood looking out upon the desolate garden, leaving her to talk to Rose for a minute or two; and then, telling my sister it was time to go, shook hands with the little gentleman, coolly bowed to the lady, and moved towards the door. But, having bid adieu to Rose, Mrs Graham presented her hand to me, saying, with a soft voice, and by no means a disagreeable smile—

"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, Mr Markham. I'm sorry I offended you by my abruptness."

When a lady condescends to apologise, there is no keeping one's anger of course; so we parted good friends for once; and this time I squeezed her hand with a cordial, not a spiteful pressure.

Chapter VI.

DURING the next four months I did not enter Mrs Graham's house, nor she mine; but still the ladies continued to talk about her, and still our acquaintance continued, though slowly, to

advance. As for their talk, I paid but little attention to that (when it related to the fair hermit, I mean), and the only information I derived from it was, that, one fine frosty day, she had ventured to take her little boy as far as the vicarage, and that, unfortunately, nobody was at home but Miss Millward; nevertheless, she had sat a long time, and, by all accounts, they had found a good deal to say to each other, and parted with a mutual desire to meet again. But Mary liked children, and fond mammas like those who can duly appreciate their treasures.

But sometimes I saw her myself, not only when she came to church, but when she was out on the hills with her son, whether taking a long, purpose-like walk, or—on special fine days—leisurely rambling over the moor or the bleak pasture-lands surrounding the old hall, herself with a book in her hand, her son gambolling about her; and on any of these occasions, when I caught sight of her in my solitary walks or rides, or while following my agricultural pursuits, I generally contrived to meet or overtake her, for I rather liked to see Mrs Graham, and to talk to her, and I decidedly liked to talk to her little companion, whom, when once the ice of his shyness was fairly broken, I found to be a very amiable, intelligent, and entertaining little fellow; and we soon became excellent friends—how much to the gratification of his mamma I cannot undertake to say. I suspected at first that she was desirous of throwing cold water on this growing intimacy—to quench, as it were, the kindling flame of our friendship—but discovering, at length, in spite of her prejudice against me, that I was perfectly harmless, and even well-intentioned, and that, between myself and my dog, her son derived a great deal of pleasure from the acquaintance that he would not otherwise have known, she ceased to object, and even welcomed my coming with a smile.

As for Arthur, he would shout his welcome from afar, and run to meet me fifty yards from his mother's side. If I happened to be on horseback, he was sure to get a canter or a gallop; or, if there was one of the draught horses within an available distance, he was treated to a steady ride upon that, which served his turn almost as well; but his mother would always follow and trudge beside him—not so much, I believe, to ensure his safe conduct, as to see that I instilled no objectionable notions into his infant mind, for she was ever on the watch, and never would allow him to be taken out of her sight. What pleased her best of all was to see him romping and racing with Sancho, while I walked by her side—not, I fear, for love of my company (though I sometimes deluded myself with that idea), so much as for the delight she took in seeing her son thus happily engaged in the enjoyment of those active sports so invigorating to his tender frame, yet so seldom exercised for want of playmates suited to his years; and, perhaps, her pleasure was sweetened not a little by the fact of my being with her instead of with him, and therefore incapable of doing him any injury directly or indirectly, designedly or otherwise, small thanks to her for that same.

But sometimes, I believe, she really had some little gratification in conversing with me; and one bright February morning, during twenty minutes' stroll along the moor, she laid aside her usual asperity and reserve, and fairly entered into conversation with me, discoursing with so much eloquence and depth of thought and feeling on a subject happily coinciding with my own ideas, and looking so beautiful withal, that I went home enchanted; and on the way (morally) started to find myself thinking that, after all, it would, perhaps, be better to spend one's days with such a woman than with Eliza Millward; and then, I (figuratively) blushed for my inconstancy.

On entering the parlour I found Eliza there with Rose, and no one else. The surprise was not altogether so agreeable as it ought to have been. We chatted together a long time, but I found her rather frivolous, and even a little insipid, compared with the more matured and earnest Mrs Graham. Alas for human constancy!

"However," thought I, "I ought not to marry Eliza, since my mother so strongly objects to it, and I ought not to delude the girl with the idea that I intended to do so. Now, if this mood continue, I shall have less difficulty in emancipating my affections from her soft yet unrelenting sway; and, though Mrs Graham might be equally objectionable, I may be permitted, like the doctors, to cure a greater evil by a less, for I shall not fall seriously in love with the young widow, I think, nor she with me—that's certain—but if I find a little pleasure in her society I may surely be allowed to seek it; and if the star of her divinity be bright enough to dim the lustre of Eliza's, so much the better, but I scarcely can think it."

And thereafter I seldom suffered a fine day to pass without paying a visit to Wildfell about the time my new acquaintance usually left her hermitage; but so frequently was I balked in my expectations of another interview, so changeable was she in her times of coming forth and in her places of resort, so transient were the occasional glimpses I was able to obtain, that I felt half inclined to think she took as much pains to avoid my company as I to seek hers; but this was too disagreeable a supposition to be entertained a moment after it could conveniently be dismissed.

One calm, clear afternoon, however, in March, as I was superintending the rolling of the meadow-land, and the repairing of a hedge in the valley, I saw Mrs Graham down by the brook, with a sketch-book in her

hand, absorbed in the exercise of her favourite art, while Arthur was putting on the time with constructing dams and breakwaters in the shallow, stony stream. I was rather in want of amusement, and so rare an opportunity was not to be neglected; so, leaving both meadow and hedge, I quickly repaired to the spot, but not before Sancho, who, immediately upon perceiving his young friend, scoured at full gallop the intervening space, and pounced upon him with an impetuous mirth that precipitated the child almost into the middle of the beck; but, happily, the stones preserved him from any serious wetting, while their smoothness prevented his being too much hurt to laugh at the untoward event.

Mrs Graham was studying the distinctive characters of the different varieties of trees in their winter nakedness, and copying, with a spirited, though delicate touch, their various ramifications. She did not talk much, but I stood and watched the progress of her pencil: it was a pleasure to behold it so dexterously guided by those fair and graceful fingers. But ere long their dexterity became impaired, they began to hesitate, to tremble slightly, and make false strokes, and then suddenly came to a pause, while their owner laughingly raised her face to mine, and told me that her sketch did not profit by my superintendence.

"Then," said I, "I'll talk to Arthur till you've done."

"I should like to have a ride, Mr Markham, if mamma will let me," said the child.

"What on, my boy?"

"I think there's a horse in that field," replied he, pointing to where the strong black mare was pulling the roller.

"No, no, Arthur; it's too far," objected his mother.

But I promised to bring him safe back after a turn or two up and down the meadow; and when she looked

at his eager face she smiled and let him go. It was the first time she had even allowed me to take him so much as half a field's length from her side.

Enthroned upon his monstrous steed, and solemnly proceeding up and down the wide, steep field, he looked the very incarnation of quiet, gleeful satisfaction and delight. The rolling, however, was soon completed; but when I dismounted the gallant horseman, and restored him to his mother, she seemed rather displeased at my keeping him so long. She had shut up her sketch-book, and been, probably, for some minutes impatiently waiting his return.

It was now high time to go home, she said, and would have bid me good evening, but I was not going to leave her yet: I accompanied her half way up the hill. She became more sociable, and I was beginning to be very happy; but, on coming within sight of the grim old hall, she stood still and turned towards me while she spoke, as if expecting I should go no further, that the conversation would end here, and I should now take leave and depart—as, indeed, it was time to do, for "the clear, cold eve" was fast "declining," the sun had set, and the gibbous moon was visibly brightening in the pale grey sky; but a feeling almost of compassion riveted me to the spot. It seemed hard to leave her to such a lonely, comfortless home. I looked up at it. Silent and grim it frowned before us. A faint, red light was gleaming from the lower windows of one wing, but all the other windows were in darkness, and many exhibited their black, cavernous gulfs, entirely destitute of glazing or framework.

"Do you not find it a desolate place to live in?" said I, after a moment of silent contemplation.

"I do, sometimes," replied she. "On winter evenings, when Arthur is in bed, and I am sitting there alone, hearing the bleak wind moaning round me and

howling through the ruinous old chambers, no books or occupations can repress the dismal thoughts and apprehensions that come crowding in—but it is folly to give way to such weakness, I know. If Rachel is satisfied with such a life, why should not I?—Indeed I cannot be too thankful for such an asylum, while it is left me."

The closing sentence was uttered in an undertone, as if spoken rather to herself than to me. She then bid me good evening and withdrew.

I had not proceeded many steps on my way homewards, when I perceived Mr Lawrence, on his pretty grey pony, coming up the rugged lane that crossed over the hill-top. I went a little out of my way to speak to him; for we had not met for some time.

"Was that Mrs Graham you were speaking to just now?" said he, after the first few words of greeting had passed between us.

"Yes."

"Humph! I thought so." He looked contemplatively at his horse's mane, as if he had some serious cause of dissatisfaction with it, or something else.

"Well! what then?"

"Oh, nothing!" replied he. "Only, I thought you disliked her," he quietly added, curling his classic lip with a slightly sarcastic smile.

"Suppose I did; mayn't a man change his mind on further acquaintance?"

"Yes, of course," returned he, nicely reducing an entanglement in the pony's redundant hoary mane. Then suddenly turning to me, and fixing his shy, hazel eyes upon me with a steady, penetrating gaze, he added, "Then you have changed your mind?"

"I can't say that I have exactly. No; I think I hold the same opinion respecting her as before—but slightly ameliorated."

"Oh!" He looked round for something else to talk about; and glancing up at the moon, made some remark upon the beauty of the evening, which I did not answer, as being irrelevant to the subject.

"Lawrence," said I, calmly looking him in the face, "are you in love with Mrs Graham?"

Instead of his being deeply offended at this, as I more than half expected he would, the first start of surprise at the audacious question was followed by a tittering laugh, as if he was highly amused at the idea.

"I in love with her!" repeated he. "What makes you dream of such a thing?"

"From the interest you take in the progress of my acquaintance with the lady, and the changes of my opinion concerning her. I thought you might be jealous."

He laughed again. "Jealous! no—but I thought you were going to marry Eliza Millward?"

"You thought wrong, then; I am not going to marry either one or the other—that I know of."

"Then I think you'd better let them alone."

"Are you going to marry Jane Wilson?"

He coloured, and played with the mane again, but answered—

"No, I think not."

"Then you had better let her alone."

She won't let me alone—he might have said; but he only looked silly and said nothing for the space of half a minute, and then made another attempt to turn the conversation; and, this time, I let it pass; for he had borne enough: another word on the subject would have been like the last atom that breaks the camel's back.

I was too late for tea; but my mother had kindly kept the tea-pot and muffin warm upon the hob, and, though she scolded me a little, readily admitted my

excuses; and when I complained of the flavour of the overdrawn tea, she poured the remainder into the slop-basin, and bade Rose put some fresh into the pot, and reboil the kettle, which offices were performed with great commotion, and certain remarkable comments.

"Well!—if it had been me now, I should have had no tea at all—if it had been Fergus, even, he would have to put up with such as there was, and been told to be thankful, for it was far too good for him; but you, we can't do too much for you. It's always so—if there's anything particularly nice at table, mamma winks and nods at me, to abstain from it, and if I don't attend to that, she whispers, 'Don't eat so much of that, Rose; Gilbert will like it for his supper'—I'm nothing at all. In the parlour, it's 'Come, Rose, put away your things, and let's have the room nice and tidy against they come in; and keep up a good fire; Gilbert likes a cheerful fire.' In the kitchen—'Make that pie a large one, Rose; I dare say the boys'll be hungry;—and don't put so much pepper in, they'll not like it, I'm sure'—or, 'Rose, don't put so many spices in the pudding, Gilbert likes it plain,'—or, 'Mind you put plenty of currants in the cake, Fergus likes plenty.' If I say, 'Well, mamma, I don't,' I'm told I ought not to think of myself—'You know, Rose, in all household matters, we have only two things to consider, first, what's proper to be done, and, secondly, what's most agreeable to the gentlemen of the house—anything will do for the ladies.'"

"And very good doctrine too," said my mother. "Gilbert thinks so, I'm sure."

"Very convenient doctrine for us, at all events," said I; "but if you would really study my pleasure, mother, you must consider your own comfort and convenience a little more than you do—as for Rose, I have no doubt she'll take care of herself; and when-

ever she does make a sacrifice or perform a remarkable act of devotedness, she'll take good care to let me know the extent of it. But for you, I might sink into the grossest condition of self-indulgence and carelessness about the wants of others, from the mere habit of being constantly cared for myself, and having all my wants anticipated or immediately supplied, while left in total ignorance of what is done for me,—if Rose did not enlighten me now and then; and I should receive all your kindness as a matter of course, and never know how much I owe you."

"Ah! and you never will know, Gilbert, till you're married. Then, when you've got some trifling, self-conceited girl like Eliza Millward, careless of everything but her own immediate pleasure and advantage, or some misguided, obstinate woman like Mrs Graham, ignorant of her principal duties, and clever only in what concerns her least to know—then you'll find the difference."

"It will do me good, mother; I was not sent into the world merely to exercise the good capacities and good feelings of others—was I?—but to exert my own towards them; and when I marry, I shall expect to find more pleasure in making my wife happy and comfortable, than in being made so by her: I would rather give than receive."

"Oh! that's all nonsense, my dear. It's mere boy's talk that! You'll soon tire of petting and humouring your wife, be she ever so charming, and then comes the trial."

"Well, then, we must bear one another's burdens."

"Then you must fall each into your proper place. You'll do your business, and she, if she's worthy of you, will do hers; but it's your business to please yourself, and hers to please you. I'm sure your poor, dear father was as good a husband as ever lived, and after

the first six months or so were over, I should as soon have expected him to fly, as to put himself out of his way to pleasure me. He always said I was a good wife, and did my duty; and he always did his—bless him!—he was steady and punctual, seldom found fault without a reason, always did justice to my good dinners, and hardly ever spoiled my cookery by delay—and that's as much as any woman can expect of any man."

Is it so, Halford? Is that the extent of your domestic virtues; and does your happy wife exact no more?

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Chapter bij.

NOT many days after this, on a mild sunny morning—rather soft under foot; for the last fall of snow was only just wasted away, leaving yet a thin ridge, here and there, lingering on the fresh green grass beneath the hedges; but beside them already, the young primroses were peeping from among their moist, dark foliage, and the lark above was singing of summer, and hope, and love, and every heavenly thing—I was out on the hillside, enjoying these delights, and looking after the well-being of my young lambs and their mothers, when, on glancing round me, I beheld three persons ascending from the vale below. They were Eliza Millward, Fergus, and Rose; so I crossed the field to meet them; and, being told they were going to Wildfell Hall, I declared myself willing to go with them, and offering my arm to Eliza, who readily accepted it in lieu of my brother's, told the latter he might go back, for I would accompany the ladies.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed he. "It's the ladies that are accompanying me, not I them. You had all had a peep at this wonderful stranger but me,

and I could endure my wretched ignorance no longer —come what would, I must be satisfied; so I begged Rose to go with me to the hall, and introduce me to her at once. She swore she would not, unless Miss Eliza would go too; so I ran to the vicarage and fetched her; and we've come hooked all the way, as fond as a pair of lovers—and now you've taken her from me; and you want to deprive me of my walk and my visit besides. Go back to your fields and your cattle, you lubberly fellow: you're not fit to associate with ladies and gentlemen, like us, that have nothing to do but to run snooking about to our neighbours' houses, peeping into their private corners, and scenting out their secrets, and picking holes in their coats, when we don't find them ready-made to our hands—you don't understand such refined sources of enjoyment."

"Can't you both go?" suggested Eliza, disregarding the latter half of the speech.

"Yes, both, to be sure!" cried Rose; "the more the merrier—and I'm sure we shall want all the cheerfulness we can carry with us to that great, dark, gloomy room, with its narrow latticed windows, and its dismal old furniture—unless she shows us into her studio again."

So we went all in a body; and the meagre old maid-servant that opened the door, ushered us into an apartment, such as Rose had described to me as the scene of her first introduction to Mrs Graham, a tolerably spacious and lofty room, but obscurely lighted by the old-fashioned windows, the ceiling, panels, and chimney-piece of grim black oak—the latter elaborately but not very tastefully carved,—with tables and chairs to match, an old bookcase on one side of the fireplace, stocked with a motley assemblage of books, and an elderly cabinet piano on the other.

The lady was seated in a stiff, high-backed, arm-

chair, with a small, round table, containing a desk and a work-basket, on one side of her, and her little boy on the other, who stood leaning his elbow on her knee, and reading to her, with wonderful fluency, from a small volume that lay in her lap; while she rested her hand on his shoulder, and abstractedly played with the long, wavy curls that fell on his ivory neck. They struck me as forming a pleasing contrast to all the surrounding objects; but of course their position was immediately changed on our entrance. I could only observe the picture during the few brief seconds that Rachel held the door for our admittance.

I do not think Mrs Graham was particularly delighted to see us: there was something indescribably chilly in her quiet, calm civility, but I did not talk much to her. Seating myself near the window, a little back from the circle, I called Arthur to me, and he and I and Sancho amused ourselves very pleasantly together, while the two young ladies baited his mother with small talk, and Fergus sat opposite, with his legs crossed, and his hands in his breeches' pockets, leaning back in his chair, and staring now up at the ceiling, now straight forward at his hostess (in a manner that made me strongly inclined to kick him out of the room), now whistling sotto voce to himself a snatch of a favourite air, now interrupting the conversation, or filling up a pause (as the case might be) with some most impertinent question or remark. At one time it was—

"It amazes me, Mrs Graham, how you could choose such a dilapidated, rickety old place as this to live in. If you couldn't afford to occupy the whole house, and have it mended up, why couldn't you take a neat little cottage?"

"Perhaps I was too proud, Mr Fergus," replied she, smiling; "perhaps I took a particular fancy for this romantic, old-fashioned place—but, indeed, it has

many advantages over a cottage. In the first place, you see, the rooms are larger and more airy; in the second place, the unoccupied apartments, which I don't pay for, may serve as lumber-rooms, if I have anything to put in them; and they are very useful for my little boy to run about in on rainy days when he can't go out; and then there is the garden for him to play in, and for me to work in. You see I have effected some little improvement already," continued she, turning to the window. "There is a bed of young vegetables in that corner, and here are some snowdrops and primroses already in bloom—and there, too, is a yellow crocus just opening in the sunshine."

"But then how can you bear such a situation—your nearest neighbours two miles distant, and nobody looking in or passing by?—Rose would go stark mad in such a place. She can't put on life unless she sees half-a-dozen fresh gowns and bonnets a day—not to speak of the faces within; but you might sit watching at these windows all day long, and never see so much as an old woman carrying her eggs to market."

"I am not sure the loneliness of the place was not one of its chief recommendations. I take no pleasure in watching people pass the windows; and I like to be quiet."

"Oh! as good as to say, you wish we would all of us mind our own business, and let you alone."

"No, I dislike an extensive acquaintance; but if I have a few friends, of course I am glad to see them occasionally. No one can be happy in eternal solitude. Therefore, Mr Fergus, if you choose to enter my house as a friend, I will make you welcome; if not, I must confess, I would rather you kept away." She then turned and addressed some observation to Rose or Eliza.

"And Mrs Graham," said he again, five minutes after, "we were disputing, as we came along, a question

that you can readily decide for us, as it mainly regarded yourself—and, indeed, we often hold discussions about our neighbours' concerns, and we, the indigenous plants of the soil, have known each other so long, and talked each other over so often, that we are quite sick of that game; so that a stranger coming amongst us makes an invaluable addition to our exhausted sources of amusement. Well, the question, or questions, you are requested to solve"——

"Hold your tongue, Fergus!" cried Rose, in a fever of apprehension and wrath.

"I won't, I tell you. The questions you are requested to solve are these:—First, concerning your birth, extraction, and previous residence. Some will have it that you are a foreigner, and some an Englishwoman; some a native of the north country, and some of the south; some say"——

"Well, Mr Fergus, I'll tell you. I'm an Englishwoman—and I don't see why any one should doubt it—and I was born in the country neither in the extreme north nor south of our happy isle; and in the country I have chiefly passed my life, and now, I hope, you are satisfied; for I am not disposed to answer any more questions at present."

"Except this"——

"No, not one more!" laughed she, and, instantly quitting her seat, she sought refuge at the window by which I was seated, and, in very desperation, to escape my brother's persecutions, endeavoured to draw me into conversation.

"Mr Markham," said she, her rapid utterance and heightened colour too plainly evincing her disquietude; "have you forgotten the fine sea-view we were speaking of some time ago? I think I must trouble you, now, to tell me the nearest way to it; for if this beautiful weather continue, I shall, perhaps, be able to walk there,

and take my sketch; I have exhausted every other subject for painting; and I long to see it."

I was about to comply with her request, but Rose would not suffer me to proceed.

"Oh, don't tell her, Gilbert!" cried she; "she shall go with us. It's —— Bay you are thinking about, I suppose, Mrs Graham? It is a very long walk, too far for you, and out of the question for Arthur. But we were thinking about making a picnic to see it, some fine day; and, if you will wait till the settled fine weather comes, I'm sure we shall all be delighted to have you amongst us."

Poor Mrs Graham looked dismayed, and attempted to make excuses, but Rose, either compassionating her lonely life, or anxious to cultivate her acquaintance, was determined to have her; and every objection was overruled. She was told it would only be a small party, and all friends, and that the best view of all was from —— Cliffs, full five miles distant.

"Just a nice walk for the gentlemen," continued Rose; "but the ladies will drive and walk by turns; for we shall have our pony-carriage, which will be plenty large enough to contain little Arthur and three ladies, together with your sketching apparatus, and our provisions."

So the proposal was finally acceded to; and, after some further discussion respecting the time and manner of the projected excursion, we rose, and took our leave.

But this was only March: a cold, wet April, and two weeks of May passed over before we could venture forth on our expedition with the reasonable hope of obtaining that pleasure we sought in pleasant prospects, cheerful society, fresh air, good cheer and exercise, without the alloy of bad roads, cold winds, or threatening clouds. Then, on a glorious morning, we gathered our forces and set forth. The company consisted of

Mrs and Master Graham, Mary and Eliza Millward, Jane and Richard Wilson, and Rose, Fergus, and Gilbert Markham.

Mr Lawrence had been invited to join us, but, for some reason best known to himself, had refused to give us his company. I had solicited the favour myself. When I did so, he hesitated, and asked who were going. Upon my naming Miss Wilson among the rest, he seemed half inclined to go, but when I mentioned Mrs Graham, thinking it might be a further inducement, it appeared to have a contrary effect, and he declined it altogether, and, to confess the truth, the decision was not displeasing to me, though I could scarcely tell you why.

It was about mid-day when we reached the place of our destination. Mrs Graham walked all the way to the cliffs; and little Arthur walked the greater part of it too; for he was now much more hardy and active than when he first entered the neighbourhood, and he did not like being in the carriage with strangers, while all his four friends, mamma, and Sancho, and Mr Markham, and Miss Millward, were on foot, journeying far behind, or passing through distant fields and lanes.

I have a very pleasant recollection of that walk, along the hard, white, sunny road, shaded here and there with bright green trees, and adorned with flowery banks, and blossoming hedges of delicious fragrance; or through pleasant fields and lanes, all glorious in the sweet flowers and brilliant verdure of delightful May. It was true, Eliza was not beside me: but she was with her friends in the pony-carriage, as happy, I trusted, as I was; and even when we pedestrians, having forsaken the highway for a short cut across the fields, beheld the little carriage far away, disappearing amid the green, embowering trees, I did not hate those

trees for snatching the dear little bonnet and shawl from my sight, nor did I feel that all those intervening objects lay between my happiness and me; for, to confess the truth, I was too happy in the company of Mrs Graham, to regret the absence of Eliza Millward.

The former, it is true, was most provokingly unsociable at first—seemingly bent upon talking to no one but Mary Millward and Arthur. She and Mary journeyed along together, generally with the child between them;—but where the road permitted, I always walked on the other side of her, Richard Wilson taking the other side of Miss Millward, and Fergus roving here and there according to his fancy; and after a while she became more friendly, and at length I succeeded in securing her attention almost entirely to myself—and then I was happy indeed; for whenever she did condescend to converse, I liked to listen. Where her opinions and sentiments tallied with mine, it was her extreme good sense, her exquisite taste and feeling, that delighted me; where they differed, it was still her uncompromising boldness in the avowal or defence of that difference, her earnestness and keenness, that piqued my fancy: and even when she angered me by her unkind words or looks, and her uncharitable conclusions respecting me, it only made me the more dissatisfied with myself for having so unfavourably impressed her, and the more desirous to vindicate my character and disposition in her eyes, and, if possible, to win her esteem.

At length our walk was ended. The increasing height and boldness of the hills had for some time intercepted the prospect; but, on gaining the summit of a steep acclivity, and looking downward, an opening lay before us—and the blue sea burst upon our sight! —deep violet blue—not deadly calm, but covered with glinting breakers—diminutive white specks twinkling on its bosom, and scarcely to be distinguished, by the

keenest vision, from the little sea-mews that sported above, their white wings glittering in the sunshine: only one or two vessels were visible: and those were far away.

I looked at my companion to see what she thought of this glorious scene. She said nothing: but she stood still, and fixed her eyes upon it with a gaze that assured me she was not disappointed. She had very fine eyes, by-the-bye—I don't know whether I've told before, but they were full of soul, large, clear, and nearly black—not brown, but very dark grey. A cool, reviving breeze blew from the sea—soft, pure, salubrious: it waved her drooping ringlets, and imparted a livelier colour to her usually too pallid lip and cheek. She felt its exhilarating influence, and so did I—I felt it tingling through my frame, but dared not give way to it while she remained so quiet. There was an aspect of subdued exhilaration in her face, that kindled into almost a smile of exalted, glad intelligence as her eye met mine. Never had she looked so lovely: never had my heart so warmly cleaved to her as now. Had we been left two minutes longer, standing there alone, I cannot answer for the consequences. Happily for my discretion, perhaps for my enjoyment during the remainder of the day, we were speedily summoned to the repast—a very respectable collation, which Rose, assisted by Miss Wilson and Eliza, who, having shared her seat in the carriage, had arrived with her a little before the rest, had set out upon an elevated platform overlooking the sea, and sheltered from the hot sun by a shelving rock and overhanging trees.

Mrs Graham seated herself at a distance from me. Eliza was my nearest neighbour. She exerted herself to be agreeable, in her gentle, unobtrusive way, and was, no doubt, as fascinating and charming as ever, if I could only have felt it. But soon, my heart began

to warm towards her once again; and we were all very merry and happy together—as far as I could see—throughout the protracted, social meal.

When that was over, Rose summoned Fergus to help her to gather up the fragments, and the knives, dishes, &c., and restore them to the baskets; and Mrs Graham took her camp-stool and drawing materials; and having begged Miss Millward to take charge of her precious son, and strictly enjoined him not to wander from his new guardian's side, she left us, and proceeded along the steep, stony hill, to a loftier, more precipitous eminence at some distance, whence a still finer prospect was to be had, where she preferred taking her sketch, though some of the ladies told her it was a frightful place, and advised her not to attempt it.

When she was gone, I felt as if there was to be no more fun—though it was difficult to say what she had contributed to the hilarity of the party. No jests, and little laughter, had escaped her lips; but her smile had animated my mirth, a keen observation or a cheerful word from her had insensibly sharpened my wits, and thrown an interest over all that was done and said by the rest. Even my conversation with Eliza had been enlivened by her presence, though I knew it not; and now that she was gone, Eliza's playful nonsense ceased to amuse me—nay, grew wearisome to my soul, and I grew weary of amusing her: I felt myself drawn by an irresistible attraction to that distant point where the fair artist sat and plied her solitary task—and not long did I attempt to resist it: while my little neighbour was exchanging a few words with Miss Wilson, I rose and cannily slipped away. A few rapid strides, and a little active clambering, soon brought me to the place where she was seated—a narrow ledge of rock at the very verge of the cliff, which descended with a steep, precipitous slant, quite down to the rocky shore.

She did not hear me coming: the falling of my shadow across her paper, gave her an electric start; and she looked hastily round—any other lady of my acquaintance would have screamed under such a sudden alarm.

"Oh! I didn't know it was you.—Why did you startle me so?" said she, somewhat testily. "I hate anybody to come upon me so unexpectedly."

"Why, what did you take me for?" said I: "if I had known you were so nervous, I would have been more cautious; but"——

"Well, never mind. What did you come for? are they all coming?"

"No; this little ledge could scarcely contain them all."

"I'm glad, for I'm tired of talking."

"Well, then, I won't talk. I'll only sit and watch your drawing."

"Oh, but you know I don't like that."

"Then I'll content myself with admiring this magnificent prospect."

She made no objection to this; and, for some time, sketched away in silence. But I could not help stealing a glance, now and then, from the splendid view at our feet to the elegant white hand that held the pencil, and the graceful neck and glossy raven curls that drooped over the paper.

"Now," thought I, "if I had but a pencil and a morsel of paper, I could make a lovelier sketch than hers, admitting I had the power to delineate faithfully what is before me."

But though this satisfaction was denied me, I was very well content to sit beside her there, and say nothing.

"Are you there still, Mr Markham?" said she at length, looking round upon me—for I was seated

a little behind on a mossy projection of the cliff.—"Why don't you go and amuse yourself with your friends?"

"Because I am tired of them, like you; and I shall have enough of them to-morrow—or at any time hence; but you I may not have the pleasure of seeing again for I know not how long."

"What was Arthur doing when you came away?"

"He was with Miss Millward where you left him—all right, but hoping mamma would not be long away. You didn't entrust him to me, by-the-bye," I grumbled, "though I had the honour of a much longer acquaintance; but Miss Millward has the art of conciliating and amusing children," I carelessly added, "if she is good for nothing else."

"Miss Millward has many estimable qualities, which such as you cannot be expected to perceive or appreciate. Will you tell Arthur that I shall come in a few minutes?"

"If that be the case, I will wait, with your permission, till those few minutes are past; and then I can assist you to descend this difficult path."

"Thank you—I always manage best, on such occasions, without assistance."

"But, at least, I can carry your stool and sketch-book."

She did not deny me this favour; but I was rather offended at her evident desire to be rid of me, and was beginning to repent of my pertinacity, when she somewhat appeased me by consulting my taste and judgment about some doubtful matter in her drawing. My opinion, happily, met her approbation, and the improvement I suggested was adopted without hesitation.

"I have often wished in vain," said she, "for another's judgment to appeal to when I could scarcely

trust the direction of my own eye and head, they having been so long occupied with the contemplation of a single object, as to become almost incapable of forming a proper idea respecting it."

"That," replied I, "is only one of many evils to which a solitary life exposes us."

"True," said she; and again we relapsed into silence.

About two minutes after, however, she declared her sketch completed, and closed the book.

On returning to the scene of our repast, we found all the company had deserted it, with the exception of three—Mary Millward, Richard Wilson, and Arthur Graham. The younger gentleman lay fast asleep with his head pillowed on the lady's lap; the other was seated beside her with a pocket edition of some classic author in his hand. He never went anywhere without such a companion wherewith to improve his leisure moments: all time seemed lost that was not devoted to study, or exacted, by his physical nature, for the bare support of life. Even now, he could not abandon himself to the enjoyment of that pure air and balmy sunshine—that splendid prospect, and those soothing sounds, the music of the waves and of the soft wind in the sheltering trees above him—not even with a lady by his side (though not a very charming one, I will allow)—he must pull out his book and make the most of his time while digesting his temperate meal, and reposing his weary limbs, unused to so much exercise.

Perhaps, however, he spared a moment to exchange a word or a glance with his companion now and then—at any rate, she did not appear at all resentful of his conduct; for her homely features wore an expression of unusual cheerfulness and serenity, and she was studying his pale, thoughtful face with great complacency when we arrived.

The journey homeward was by no means so agreeable, to me, as the former part of the day; for now Mrs Graham was in the carriage, and Eliza Millward was the companion of my walk. She had observed my preference for the young widow, and evidently felt herself neglected. She did not manifest her chagrin by keen reproaches, bitter sarcasms, or pouting sullen silence —any or all of these I could easily have endured, or lightly laughed away; but she showed it by a kind of gentle melancholy, a mild, reproachful sadness that cut me to the heart. I tried to cheer her up, and apparently succeeded in some degree, before the walk was over; but in the very act my conscience reproved me, knowing, as I did, that, sooner or later, the tie must be broken, and this was only nourishing false hopes, and putting off the evil day.

When the pony-carriage had approached as near Wildfell Hall as the road would permit—unless, indeed, it proceeded up the long rough lane, which Mrs Graham would not allow—the young widow and her son alighted, relinquishing the latter's seat to Rose; and I persuaded Eliza to take the driver's place. Having put her comfortably in, bid her take care of the evening air, and wished her a kind good-night, I felt considerably relieved, and hastened to offer my services to Mrs Graham to carry her apparatus up the fields, but she had already hung her camp-stool on her arm and taken her sketch-book in her hand; and insisted upon bidding me adieu then and there, with the rest of the company. But this time, she declined my proffered aid in so kind and friendly a manner that I almost forgave her.

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Chapter viij.

SIX weeks had passed away. It was a splendid morning about the close of June. Most of the hay was cut, but the last week had been very unfavourable; and now that fine weather was come at last, being determined to make the most of it, I had gathered all hands together into the hayfield, and was working away myself, in the midst of them, in my shirt-sleeves, with a light, shady straw hat on my head, catching up armfuls of moist, reeking grass, and shaking it out to the four winds of heaven, at the head of a goodly file of servants and hirelings—intending so to labour, from morning to night, with as much zeal and assiduity as I could look for from any of them, as well to prosper the work by my own exertion as to animate the workers by my example—when lo! my resolutions were overthrown in a moment, by the simple fact of my brother's running up to me and putting into my hand a small parcel, just arrived from London, which I had been for some time expecting. I tore off the cover, and disclosed an elegant and portable edition of "Marmion."

"I guess I know who that's for," said Fergus, who stood looking on while I complacently examined the volume. "That's for Miss Eliza, now."

He pronounced this with a tone and look so prodigiously knowing, that I was glad to contradict him.

"You're wrong, my lad," said I; and taking up my coat, I deposited the book in one of its pockets, and then put it on (*i.e.*, the coat). "Now come here, you idle dog, and make yourself useful for once;" I continued—"Pull off your coat, and take my place in the field till I come back."

"Till you come back?—and where are you going, pray?"

"No matter where—the when is all that concerns you; and I shall be back by dinner, at least."

"Oh, ho! and I'm to labour away till then, am I?—and to keep all these fellows hard at it besides? Well, well! I'll submit—for once in a way.—Come, my lads, you must look sharp: I'm come to help you now:—and woe be to that man, or woman either, that pauses for a moment amongst you—whether to stare about him, to scratch his head, or blow his nose—no pretext will serve—nothing but work, work, work in the sweat of your face," &c., &c.

Leaving him thus haranguing the people, more to their amusement than edification, I returned to the house, and having made some alteration in my toilet, hastened away to Wildfell Hall with the book in my pocket; for it was destined for the shelves of Mrs Graham.

"What, then, had she and you got on so well together as to come to the giving and receiving of presents?"—Not precisely, old buck; this was my first experiment in that line; and I was very anxious to see the result of it.

We had met several times since the —— Bay excursion, and I had found she was not averse to my company, provided I confined my conversation to the discussion of abstract matters or topics of common interest;—the moment I touched upon the sentimental or the complimentary, or made the slightest approach to tenderness in word or look, I was not only punished by an immediate change in her manner at the time, but doomed to find her more cold and distant, if not entirely inaccessible, when next I sought her company. This circumstance did not greatly disconcert me, however, because I attributed it, not so much to any dislike of my person, as to some absolute resolution against a second marriage formed prior to the time of our acquaintance,

whether from excess of affection for her late husband, or because she had had enough of him and the matrimonial state together. At first, indeed, she had seemed to take a pleasure in mortifying my vanity and crushing my presumption—relentlessly nipping off bud by bud as they ventured to appear; and then, I confess, I was deeply wounded, though, at the same time, stimulated to seek revenge;—but latterly, finding, beyond a doubt, that I was not that empty-headed coxcomb she had at first supposed me, she had repulsed my modest advances in quite a different spirit. It was a kind of serious, almost sorrowful displeasure, which I soon learnt carefully to avoid awakening.

"Let me first establish my position as a friend," thought I,—"the patron and playfellow of her son, the sober, solid, plain-dealing friend of herself, and then, when I have made myself fairly necessary to her comfort and enjoyment in life (as I believe I can), we'll see what next may be effected."

So we talked about painting, poetry, and music, theology, geology, and philosophy: once or twice I lent her a book, and once she lent me one in return: I met her in her walks as often as I could; I came to her house as often as I dared. My first pretext for invading the sanctum was to bring Arthur a little waddling puppy of which Sancho was the father, and which delighted the child beyond expression, and, consequently, could not fail to please his mamma. My second was to bring him a book, which, knowing his mother's particularity, I had carefully selected, and which I submitted for her approbation before presenting it to him. Then, I brought her some plants for her garden, in my sister's name—having previously persuaded Rose to send them. Each of these times I inquired after the picture she was painting from the sketch taken on the cliff, and was admitted into the studio, and asked my opinion or advice respecting its progress.

My last visit had been to return the book she had lent me; and then it was, that, in casually discussing the poetry of Sir Walter Scott, she had expressed a wish to see "Marmion," and I had conceived the presumptuous idea of making her a present of it, and, on my return home, instantly sent for the smart little volume I had this morning received. But an apology for invading the hermitage was still necessary; so I had furnished myself with a blue morocco collar for Arthur's little dog; and that being given and received, with much more joy and gratitude, on the part of the receiver, than the worth of the gift or the selfish motive of the giver deserved, I ventured to ask Mrs Graham for one more look at the picture, if it was still there.

"Oh, yes! come in," said she (for I had met them in the garden). "It is finished and framed, all ready for sending away; but give me your last opinion, and, if you can suggest any further improvement, it shall be —duly considered, at least."

The picture was strikingly beautiful: it was the very scene itself, transferred as if by magic to the canvas; but I expressed my approbation in guarded terms, and few words, for fear of displeasing her. She, however, attentively watched my looks, and her artist's pride was gratified, no doubt, to read my heartfelt admiration in my eyes. But, while I gazed, I thought upon the book, and wondered how it was to be presented. My heart failed me; but I determined not to be such a fool as to come away without having made the attempt. It was useless waiting for an opportunity, and useless trying to concoct a speech for the occasion. The more plainly and naturally the thing was done, the better, I thought; so I just looked out of the window to screw up my courage, and then pulled out the book, turned round, and put it into her hand, with this short explanation—

"You were wishing to see 'Marmion,' Mrs Graham; and here it is, if you will be so kind as to take it."

A momentary blush suffused her face—perhaps a blush of sympathetic shame for such an awkward style of presentation: she gravely examined the volume on both sides; then silently turned over the leaves, knitting her brows the while, in serious cogitation; then closed the book, and turning from it to me, quietly asked the price of it—I felt the hot blood rush to my face.

"I'm sorry to offend you, Mr Markham," said she, "but unless I pay for the book, I cannot take it." And she laid it on the table.

"Why cannot you?"

"Because" — she paused, and looked at the carpet.

"Why cannot you?" I repeated, with a degree of irascibility that roused her to lift her eyes, and look me steadily in the face.

"Because I don't like to put myself under obligations that I can never repay—I am obliged to you already for your kindness to my son; but his grateful affection and your own good feelings must reward you for that."

"Nonsense!" ejaculated I.

She turned her eyes on me again, with a look of quiet, grave surprise, that had the effect of a rebuke, whether intended for such or not.

"Then you won't take the book?" I asked, more mildly than I had yet spoken.

"I will gladly take it, if you will let me pay for it."

I told her the exact price, and the cost of the carriage besides, in as calm a tone as I could command—for, in fact, I was ready to weep with disappointment and vexation.

She produced her purse, and coolly counted out the money, but hesitated to put it into my hand. Atten-

tively regarding me, in a tone of soothing softness, she observed—

"You think yourself insulted, Mr Markham—I wish I could make you understand that—that I"——

"I do understand you, perfectly," I said. "You think that if you were to accept that trifle from me now, I should presume upon it hereafter; but you are mistaken:—if you will only oblige me by taking it, believe me, I shall build no hopes upon it, and consider this no precedent for future favours:—and it is nonsense to talk about putting yourself under obligations to me when you must know that in such a case the obligation is entirely on my side,—the favour on yours."

"Well, then, I'll take you at your word," she answered, with a most angelic smile, returning the odious money to her purse—"but remember!"

"I will remember—what I have said;—but do not you punish my presumption by withdrawing your friendship entirely from me,—or expect me to atone for it by being more distant than before," said I, extending my hand to take leave, for I was too much excited to remain.

"Well then! let us be as we were," replied she, frankly placing her hand in mine; and while I held it there, I had much difficulty to refrain from pressing it to my lips;—but that would be suicidal madness; I had been bold enough already, and this premature offering had well-nigh given the death-blow to my hopes.

It was with an agitated burning heart and brain that I hurried homewards, regardless of that scorching noonday sun—forgetful of everything but her I had just left—regretting nothing but her impenetrability, and my own precipitancy and want of tact—fearing nothing but her hateful resolution, and my inability to overcome it—hoping nothing——But halt,—I will not bore you with my conflicting hopes and fears—my serious cogitations and resolves.

Chapter ix.

THOUGH my affections might now be said to be fairly weaned from Eliza Millward, I did not yet entirely relinquish my visits to the vicarage, because I wanted, as it were, to let her down easy; without raising much sorrow, or incurring much resentment,—or making myself the talk of the parish; and besides, if I had wholly kept away, the vicar, who looked upon my visits as paid chiefly, if not entirely, to himself, would have felt himself decidedly affronted by the neglect. But when I called there the day after my interview with Mrs Graham, he happened to be from home—a circumstance by no means so agreeable to me now as it had been on former occasions. Miss Millward was there, it is true, but she, of course, would be little better than a nonentity. However, I resolved to make my visit a short one, and to talk to Eliza in a brotherly, friendly sort of way, such as our long acquaintance might warrant me in assuming, and which, I thought, could neither give offence nor serve to encourage false hopes.

It was never my custom to talk about Mrs Graham either to her or to any one else; but I had not been seated three minutes, before she brought that lady on to the carpet herself, in a rather remarkable manner.

"Oh, Mr Markham!" said she, with a shocked expression and voice subdued almost to a whisper, "what do you think of these shocking reports about Mrs Graham?—can you encourage us to disbelieve them?"

"What reports?"

"Ah, now! you know!" she slyly smiled and shook her head.

"I know nothing about them. What in the world do you mean, Eliza?"

"Oh, don't ask me! *I* can't explain it." She took up the cambric handkerchief which she had been beautifying with a deep lace border, and began to be very busy.

"What is it, Miss Millward? what does she mean?" said I, appealing to her sister, who seemed to be absorbed in the hemming of a large, coarse sheet.

"I don't know," replied she. "Some idle slander somebody has been inventing, I suppose. I never heard it till Eliza told me the other day,—but if all the parish dinned it in my ears, I shouldn't believe a word of it—I know Mrs Graham too well!"

"Quite right, Miss Millward!—and so do I—whatever it may be."

"Well!" observed Eliza, with a gentle sigh, "it's well to have such a comfortable assurance regarding the worth of those we love. I only wish you may not find your confidence misplaced."

And she raised her face, and gave me such a look of sorrowful tenderness as might have melted my heart, but within those eyes there lurked a something that I did not like; and I wondered how I ever could have admired them; her sister's honest face and small grey optics appeared far more agreeable; but I was out of temper with Eliza, at that moment, for her insinuations against Mrs Graham, which were false, I was certain, whether she knew it or not.

I said nothing more on the subject, however, at the time, and but little on any other; for, finding I could not well recover my equanimity, I presently rose and took leave, excusing myself under the plea of business at the farm; and to the farm I went, not troubling my mind one whit about the possible truth of these mysterious reports, but only wondering what they were, by whom originated, and on what foundations raised, and how they could the most effectually be silenced or disproved.

A few days after this, we had another of our quiet little parties, to which the usual company of friends and neighbours had been invited, and Mrs Graham among the number. She could not now absent herself under the plea of dark evenings or inclement weather, and, greatly to my relief, she came. Without her I should have found the whole affair an intolerable bore; but the moment of her arrival brought new life to the house, and though I must not neglect the other guests for her, or expect to engross much of her attention and conversation to myself alone, I anticipated an evening of no common enjoyment.

Mr Lawrence came too. He did not arrive till some time after the rest were assembled. I was curious to see how he would comport himself to Mrs Graham. A slight bow was all that passed between them on his entrance; and having politely greeted the other members of the company, he seated himself quite aloof from the young widow, between my mother and Rose.

"Did you ever see such art?" whispered Eliza, who was my nearest neighbour. "Would you not say they were perfect strangers?"

"Almost; but what then?"

"What then! why, you can't pretend to be ignorant?"

"Ignorant of what?" demanded I, so sharply that she started and replied—

"Oh, hush! don't speak so loud."

"Well, tell me then," I answered in a lower tone, "what is it you mean? I hate enigmas."

"Well, you know, I don't vouch for the truth of it—indeed, far from it—but haven't you heard"——

"I've heard nothing, except from you."

"You must be wilfully deaf then, for any one will tell you that; but I shall only anger you by repeating it, I see, so I had better hold my tongue."

She closed her lips and folded her hands before her with an air of injured meekness.

"If you had wished not to anger me, you should have held your tongue from the beginning; or else spoken out plainly and honestly all you had to say."

She turned aside her face, pulled out her handkerchief, rose and went to the window, where she stood for some time, evidently dissolved in tears. I was astounded, provoked, ashamed—not so much of my harshness as for her childish weakness. However, no one seemed to notice her, and shortly after we were summoned to the tea-table; in those parts it was customary to sit to the table at tea-time, on all occasions, and make a meal of it, for we dined early. On taking my seat, I had Rose on one side of me, and an empty chair on the other.

"May I sit by you?" said a soft voice at my elbow.

"If you like," was the reply; and Eliza slipped into the vacant chair; then looking up into my face with a half-sad, half-playful smile, she whispered—

"You're so stern, Gilbert."

I handed down her tea with a slightly contemptuous smile, and said nothing, for I had nothing to say.

"What have I done to offend you?" said she, more plaintively. "I wish I knew."

"Come, take your tea, Eliza, and don't be foolish," responded I, handing her the sugar and cream.

Just then, there arose a slight commotion on the other side of me, occasioned by Miss Wilson's coming to negotiate an exchange of seats with Rose.

"Will you be so good as to exchange places with me, Miss Markham?" said she, "for I don't like to sit by Mrs Graham. If your mamma thinks proper to invite such persons to her house, she cannot object to her daughter's keeping company with them."

This latter clause was added in a sort of soliloquy

when Rose was gone; but I was not polite enough to let it pass.

"Will you be so good as to tell me what you mean, Miss Wilson?" said I.

The question startled her a little, but not much.

"Why, Mr Markham," replied she coolly, having quickly recovered her self-possession, "it surprises me rather that Mrs Markham should invite such a person as Mrs Graham to her house; but, perhaps, she is not aware that the lady's character is considered scarcely respectable."

"She is not, nor am I; and therefore you will oblige me by explaining your meaning a little further."

"This is scarcely the time or the place for such explanations; but I think you can hardly be so ignorant as you pretend, you must know her as well as I do."

"I think I do, perhaps a little better; and therefore, if you will inform me what you have heard or imagined against her, I shall perhaps be able to set you right."

"Can you tell me, then, who was her husband, or if she ever had any?"

Indignation kept me silent. At such a time and place I could not trust myself to answer.

"Have you never observed," said Eliza, "what a striking likeness there is between that child of hers and"——

"And whom?" demanded Miss Wilson, with an air of cold, but keen severity.

Eliza was startled; the timidly spoken suggestion had been intended for my ear alone.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" pleaded she, "I may be mistaken—perhaps I was mistaken." But she accompanied the words with a sly glance of derision directed to me from the corner of her disingenuous eye.

"There's no need to ask my pardon," replied her friend,

"but I see no one here that at all resembles that child, except his mother; and when you hear ill-natured reports, Miss Eliza, I will thank you, that is, I think you will do well, to refrain from repeating them. I presume the person you allude to is Mr Lawrence; but I think I can assure you that your suspicions, in that respect, are utterly misplaced; and if he has any particular connection with the lady at all (which no one has a right to assert), at least he has (what cannot be said of some others) sufficient sense of propriety to withhold him from acknowledging anything more than a bowing acquaintance in the presence of respectable persons; he was evidently both surprised and annoyed to find her here."

"Go it!" cried Fergus, who sat on the other side of Eliza, and was the only individual who shared that side of the table with us, "go it like bricks! mind you don't leave her one stone upon another."

Miss Wilson drew herself up with a look of freezing scorn, but said nothing. Eliza would have replied, but I interrupted her by saying as calmly as I could, though in a tone which betrayed, no doubt, some little of what I felt within—

"We have had enough of this subject; if we can only speak to slander our betters, let us hold our tongues."

"I think you'd better," observed Fergus, "and so does our good parson; he has been addressing the company in his richest vein all the while, and eyeing you from time to time, with looks of stern distaste, while you sat there, irreverently whispering and muttering together; and once he paused in the middle of a story or a sermon, I don't know which, and fixed his eyes upon you, Gilbert, as much as to say, 'When Mr Markham has done flirting with those two ladies I will proceed.'"

What more was said at the tea-table I cannot tell, nor how I found patience to sit till the meal was over. I remember, however, that I swallowed with difficulty the remainder of the tea that was in my cup and ate nothing: and that the first thing I did was to stare at Arthur Graham, who sat beside his mother on the opposite side of the table, and the second to stare at Mr Lawrence, who sat below; and, first, it struck me that there was a likeness; but, on further contemplation, I concluded it was only in imagination. Both, it is true, had more delicate features and smaller bones than commonly fall to the lot of individuals of the rougher sex, and Lawrence's complexion was pale and clear, and Arthur's delicately fair; but Arthur's tiny, somewhat snubby nose could never become so long and straight as Mr Lawrence's; and the outline of his face, though not full enough to be round, and too finely converging to the small, dimpled chin to be square, could never be drawn out to the long oval of the other's, while the child's hair was evidently of a lighter, warmer tint than the elder gentleman's had ever been, and his large, clear, blue eyes, though prematurely serious at times, were utterly dissimilar to the shy hazel eyes of Mr Lawrence, whence the sensitive soul looked so distrustfully forth, as ever ready to retire within, from the offences of a too rude, too uncongenial world. Wretch that I was to harbour that detestable idea for a moment! Did I not know Mrs Graham? Had I not seen her, conversed with her time after time? Was I not certain that she, in intellect, in purity and elevation of soul, was immeasurably superior to any of her detractors; that she was, in fact, the noblest, the most adorable, of her sex I had ever beheld, or even imagined to exist? Yes, and I would say with Mary Millward (sensible girl as she was), that if all the parish, ay, or all the world, should din these horrible lies in my ears,

I would not believe them, for I knew her better than they.

Meantime my brain was on fire with indignation, and my heart seemed ready to burst from its prison with conflicting passions. I regarded my two fair neighbours with a feeling of abhorrence and loathing I scarcely endeavoured to conceal. I was rallied from several quarters for my abstraction and ungallant neglect of the ladies; but I cared little for that: all I cared about, besides that one grand subject of my thoughts, was to see the cups travel up to the tea-tray, and not come down again. I thought Mr Millward never would cease telling us that he was no tea-drinker, and that it was highly injurious to keep loading the stomach with slops to the exclusion of more wholesome sustenance, and so give himself time to finish his fourth cup.

At length it was over; and I rose and left the table and the guests without a word of apology—I could endure their company no longer. I rushed out to cool my brain in the balmy evening air, and to compose my mind or indulge my passionate thoughts in the solitude of the garden.

To avoid being seen from the windows I went down a quiet little avenue that skirted one side of the inclosure, at the bottom of which was a seat embowered in roses and honeysuckles. Here I sat down to think over the virtues and wrongs of the lady of Wildfell Hall; but I had not been so occupied two minutes, before voices and laughter, and glimpses of moving objects through the trees, informed me that the whole company had turned out to take an airing in the garden too. However, I nestled up in a corner of the bower, and hoped to retain possession of it, secure alike from observation and intrusion. But no—confound it—there was some one coming down the avenue! Why

couldn't they enjoy the flowers and sunshine of the open garden, and leave that sunless nook to me, and the gnats and midges.

But, peeping through my fragrant screen of the interwoven branches to discover who the intruders were (for a murmur of voices told me it was more than one), my vexation instantly subsided, and far other feelings agitated my still unquiet soul; for there was Mrs Graham, slowly moving down the walk with Arthur by her side, and no one else. Why were they alone? Had the poison of detracting tongues already spread through all; and had they all turned their backs upon her? I now recollected having seen Mrs Wilson, in the early part of the evening, edging her chair close up to my mother, and bending forward, evidently in the delivery of some important, confidential intelligence; and from the incessant wagging of her head, the frequent distortions of her wrinkled physiognomy, and the winking and malicious twinkle of her little ugly eyes, I judged it was some spicy piece of scandal that engaged her powers; and from the cautious privacy of the communication I supposed some person then present was the luckless object of her calumnies; and from all these tokens, together with my mother's looks and gestures of mingled horror and incredulity, I now concluded that object to have been Mrs Graham. I did not emerge from my place of concealment till she had nearly reached the bottom of the walk, lest my appearance should drive her away; and when I did step forward she stood still and seemed inclined to turn back as it was.

"Oh, don't let us disturb you, Mr Markham!" said she. "We came here to seek retirement ourselves, not to intrude on your seclusion."

"I am no hermit, Mrs Graham—though I own it looks rather like it to absent myself in this uncourteous fashion from my guests."

"I feared you were unwell," said she, with a look of real concern.

"I was rather, but it's over now. Do sit here a little and rest, and tell me how you like this arbour," said I, and lifting Arthur by the shoulders, I planted him in the middle of the seat by way of securing his mamma, who, acknowledging it to be a tempting place of refuge, threw herself back in one corner while I took possession of the other.

But that word refuge disturbed me. Had their unkindness then really driven her to seek for peace in solitude?

"Why have they left you alone?" I asked.

"It is I who have left them," was the smiling rejoinder. "I was wearied to death with small talk—nothing wears me out like that. I cannot imagine how they go on as they do."

I could not help smiling at the serious depth of her wonderment.

"Is it that they think it a duty to be continually talking," pursued she, "and so never pause to think, but fill up with aimless trifles and vain repetitions when subjects of real interest fail to present themselves? or do they really take a pleasure in such discourse?"

"Very likely they do," said I: "their shallow minds can hold no great ideas, and their light heads are carried away by trivialities that would not move a better-furnished skull: and their only alternative to such discourse is to plunge over head and ears into the slough of scandal—which is their chief delight."

"Not all of them, surely?" cried the lady, astonished at the bitterness of my remark.

"No, certainly; I exonerate my sister from such degraded tastes, and my mother, too, if you included her in your animadversions."

"I meant no animadversions against any one, and

certainly intended no disrespectful allusions to your mother. I have known some sensible persons adepts in that style of conversation when circumstances impelled them to it; but it is a gift I cannot boast the possession of. I kept up my attention on this occasion as long as I could, but when my powers were exhausted I stole away to seek a few minutes' repose in this quiet walk. I hate talking where there is no exchange of ideas or sentiments, and no good given or received."

"Well," said I, "if ever I trouble you with my loquacity tell me so at once, and I promise not to be offended; for I possess the faculty of enjoying the company of those I——of my friends as well in silence as in conversation."

"I don't quite believe you; but if it were so you would exactly suit me for a companion."

"I am all you wish, then, in other respects?"

"No, I don't mean that. How beautiful those little clusters of foliage look, where the sun comes through behind them!" said she, on purpose to change the subject.

And they did look beautiful, where at intervals the level rays of the sun penetrating the thickness of trees and shrubs on the opposite side of the path before us, relieved their dusky verdure by displaying patches of semi-transparent leaves of resplendent golden green.

"I almost wish I were not a painter," observed my companion.

"Why so! one would think at such a time you would most exult in your privilege of being able to imitate the various brilliant and delightful touches of nature."

"No; for instead of delivering myself up to the full enjoyment of them as others do, I am always troubling my head about how I could produce the same effect upon canvas; and as that can never be done, it is mere vanity and vexation of spirit."

"Perhaps you cannot do it to satisfy yourself, but you may and do succeed in delighting others with the result of your endeavours."

"Well, after all I should not complain: perhaps few people gain their livelihood with so much pleasure in their toil as I do. Here is some one coming."

She seemed vexed at the interruption.

"It is only Mr Lawrence and Miss Wilson," said I, "coming to enjoy a quiet stroll. They will not disturb us."

I could not quite decipher the expression on her face; but I was satisfied there was no jealousy therein. What business had I to look for it?

"What sort of a person is Miss Wilson?" she asked.

"She is elegant and accomplished above the generality of her birth and station; and some say she is lady-like and agreeable."

"I thought her somewhat frigid, and rather supercilious in her manner to-day."

"Very likely she might be so to you. She has possibly taken a prejudice against you, for I think she regards you in the light of a rival."

"Me! Impossible, Mr Markham!" said she, evidently astonished and annoyed.

"Well, I know nothing about it," returned I, rather doggedly; for I thought her annoyance was chiefly against myself.

The pair had now approached within a few paces of us. Our arbour was set snugly back in a corner before which the avenue at its termination turned off into the more airy walk along the bottom of the garden. As they approached this, I saw, by the aspect of Jane Wilson, that she was directing her companion's attention to us; and, as well by her cold, sarcastic smile as by the few isolated words of her discourse that reached

me, I knew full well that she was impressing him with the idea that we were strongly attached to each other. I noticed that he coloured up to the temples, gave us one furtive glance in passing, and walked on, looking grave, but seemingly offering no reply to her remarks.

It was true, then, that he had some designs upon Mrs Graham; and, were they honourable, he would not be so anxious to conceal them. She was blameless, of course, but he was detestable beyond all count.

While these thoughts flashed through my mind, my companion abruptly rose, and calling her son, said they would now go in quest of the company, and departed up the avenue. Doubtless she had heard or guessed something of Miss Wilson's remarks, and therefore it was natural enough she should choose to continue the tête-à-tête no longer, especially as at that moment my cheeks were burning with indignation against my former friend, the token of which she might mistake for a blush of stupid embarrassment. For this I owed Miss Wilson yet another grudge; and still the more I thought upon her conduct the more I hated her.

It was late in the evening before I joined the company. I found Mrs Graham already equipped for departure, and taking leave of the rest, who were now returned to the house. I offered, nay, begged to accompany her home. Mr Lawrence was standing by at the time conversing with some one else. He did not look at us, but, on hearing my earnest request, he paused in the middle of a sentence to listen for her reply, and went on, with a look of quiet satisfaction, the moment he found it was to be a denial.

A denial it was, decided, though not unkind. She could not be persuaded to think there was danger for herself or her child in traversing those lonely lanes and fields without attendance. It was daylight still, and she should meet no one; or if she did, the people were

quiet and harmless she was well assured. In fact, she would not hear of any one's putting himself out of the way to accompany her, though Fergus vouchsafed to offer his services in case they should be more acceptable than mine, and my mother begged she might send one of the farming-men to escort her.

When she was gone the rest was all a blank or worse. Lawrence attempted to draw me into conversation, but I snubbed him and went to another part of the room. Shortly after the party broke up and he himself took leave. When he came to me I was blind to his extended hand, and deaf to his good-night till he repeated it a second time; and then, to get rid of him, I muttered an inarticulate reply accompanied by a sulky nod.

"What is the matter, Markham?" whispered he.

I replied by a wrathful and contemptuous stare.

"Are you angry because Mrs Graham would not let you go home with her?" he asked, with a faint smile that nearly exasperated me beyond control.

But, swallowing down all fierce answers, I merely demanded—

"What business is it of yours?"

"Why, none," replied he, with provoking quietness; "only," and he raised his eyes to my face, and spoke with unusual solemnity, "only let me tell you, Markham, that if you have any designs in that quarter they will certainly fail; and it grieves me to see you cherishing false hopes, and wasting your strength in useless efforts, for"—

"Hypocrite!" I exclaimed; and he held his breath, and looked very blank, turned white about the gills, and went away without another word.

I had wounded him to the quick; and I was glad of it.

Chapter x.

WHEN all were gone, I learned that the vile slander had indeed been circulated throughout the company, in the very presence of the victim. Rose, however, vowed she did not and would not believe it, and my mother made the same declaration, though not, I fear, with the same amount of real, unwavering incredulity. It seemed to dwell continually on her mind, and she kept irritating me from time to time by such expressions as—"Dear, dear, who would have thought it!—Well! I always thought there was something odd about her.—You see what it is for women to affect to be different to other people." And once it was—

"I misdoubted that appearance of mystery from the very first—I thought there would no good come of it; but this is a sad, sad business to be sure!"

"Why, mother, you said you didn't believe these tales," said Fergus.

"No more I do, my dear; but then, you know, there must be some foundation."

"The foundation is in the wickedness and falsehood of the world," said I, "and in the fact that Mr Lawrence has been seen to go that way once or twice of an evening—and the village gossips say he goes to pay his addresses to the strange lady, and the scandal-mongers have greedily seized the rumour, to make it the basis of their own infernal structure."

"Well, but Gilbert, there must be something in her manner to countenance such reports."

"Did you see anything in her manner?"

"No, certainly; but then you know, I always said there was something strange about her."

I believe it was on that very evening that I ventured

on another invasion of Wildfell Hall. From the time of our party, which was upwards of a week ago, I had been making daily efforts to meet its mistress in her walks; and always disappointed (she must have managed it so on purpose), had nightly kept revolving in my mind some pretext for another call. At length, I concluded that the separation could be endured no longer (by this time, you will see, I was pretty far gone); and, taking from the book-case an old volume that I thought she might be interested in, though, from its unsightly and somewhat dilapidated condition, I had not yet ventured to offer it for perusal, I hastened away,—but not without sundry misgivings as to how she would receive me, or how I could summon courage to present myself with so slight an excuse. But, perhaps, I might see her in the field or the garden, and then there would be no great difficulty: it was the formal knocking at the door, with the prospect of being gravely ushered in by Rachel, to the presence of a surprised, uncordial mistress, that so greatly disturbed me.

My wish, however, was not gratified. Mrs Graham, herself, was not to be seen; but there was Arthur playing with his frolicsome little dog in the garden. I looked over the gate and called him to me. He wanted me to come in; but I told him I could not without his mother's leave.

"I'll go and ask her," said the child.

"No, no, Arthur, you mustn't do that,—but if she's not engaged, just ask her to come here a minute: tell her I want to speak to her."

He ran to perform my bidding, and quickly returned with his mother. How lovely she looked with her dark ringlets streaming in the light summer breeze, her fair cheek slightly flushed and her countenance radiant with smiles!—Dear Arthur! what did I not owe to you for this and every other happy meeting?—Through

him, I was at once delivered from all formality, and terror, and constraint. In love affairs, there is no mediator like a merry, simple-hearted child—ever ready to cement divided hearts, to span the unfriendly gulf of custom, to melt the ice of cold reserve, and overthrow the separating walls of dread formality and pride.

"Well, Mr Markham, what is it?" said the young mother, accosting me with a pleasant smile.

"I want you to look at this book, and, if you please, to take it, and peruse it at your leisure. I make no apology for calling you out on such a lovely evening, though it be for a matter of no greater importance."

"Tell him to come in, mamma," said Arthur.

"Would you like to come in?" asked the lady.

"Yes; I should like to see your improvements in the garden."

"And how your sister's roots have prospered in my charge," added she, as she opened the gate.

And we sauntered through the garden, and talked of the flowers, the trees, and the book,—and then of other things. The evening was kind and genial, and so was my companion. By degrees, I waxed more warm and tender than, perhaps, I had ever been before; but still, I said nothing tangible, and she attempted no repulse; until, in passing a moss rose-tree that I had brought her some weeks since, in my sister's name, she plucked a beautiful half-open bud and bade me give it to Rose.

"May I not keep it myself?" I asked.

"No; but here is another for you."

Instead of taking it quietly, I likewise took the hand that offered it, and looked into her face. She let me hold it for a moment, and I saw a flash of ecstatic brilliance in her eye, a glow of glad excitement on her face—I thought my hour of victory was come—but instantly a painful recollection seemed to flash upon her; a cloud

of anguish darkened her brow, a marble paleness blanched her cheek and lip; there seemed a moment of inward conflict,—and with a sudden effort, she withdrew her hand, and retreated a step or two back.

"Now, Mr Markham," said she, with a kind of desperate calmness, "I must tell you plainly, that I cannot do with this. I like your company, because I am alone here, and your conversation pleases me more than that of any other person; but if you cannot be content to regard me as a friend—a plain, cold, motherly, or sisterly friend, I must beg you to leave me now, and let me alone hereafter—in fact, we must be strangers for the future."

"I will, then—be your friend,—or brother, or anything you wish, if you will only let me continue to see you; but tell me why I cannot be anything more."

There was a perplexed and thoughtful pause.

"Is it in consequence of some rash vow?"

"It is something of the kind," she answered—"some day I may tell you, but at present you had better leave me; and never, Gilbert, put me to the painful necessity of repeating what I have just now said to you!"—she earnestly added, giving me her hand in serious kindness. How sweet, how musical my own name sounded in her mouth!

"I will not," I replied. "But you pardon this offence?"

"On condition that you never repeat it."

"And may I come to see you now and then?"

"Perhaps,—occasionally; provided you never abuse the privilege."

"I make no empty promises, but you shall see."

"The moment you do, our intimacy is at an end, that's all."

"And will you always call me Gilbert?—it sounds

more sisterly, and it will serve to remind me of our contract."

She smiled, and once more bid me go—and, at length, I judged it prudent to obey; and she re-entered the house, and I went down the hill. But as I went, the tramp of horses' hoofs fell on my ear, and broke the stillness of the dewy evening; and, looking towards the lane, I saw a solitary equestrian coming up. Inclining to dusk as it was, I knew him at a glance: it was Mr Lawrence on his grey pony. I flew across the field—leaped the stone fence—and then walked down the lane to meet him. On seeing me, he suddenly drew in his little steed, and seemed inclined to turn back, but on second thought, apparently judged it better to continue his course as before. He accosted me with a slight bow, and, edging close to the wall, endeavoured to pass on—but I was not so minded: seizing his horse by the bridle, I exclaimed—

"Now, Lawrence, I will have this mystery explained! Tell me where you are going, and what you mean to do—at once, and distinctly!"

"Will you take your hand off the bridle?" said he quietly—"you're hurting my pony's mouth."

"You and your pony be"——

"What makes you so coarse and brutal, Markham? I'm quite ashamed of you."

"You answer my questions—before you leave this spot! I will know what you mean by this perfidious duplicity!"

"I shall answer no questions till you let go the bridle,—if you stand till morning."

"Now then," said I, unclosing my hand, but still standing before him.

"Ask me some other time, when you can speak like a gentleman," returned he, and he made an effort to pass me again; but I quickly re-captured the pony,

scarce less astonished than its master at such uncivil usage.

"Really, Mr Markham, this is too much!" said the latter. "Can I not go to see my tenant on matters of business, without being assaulted in this manner by"——

"This is no time for business, sir!—I'll tell you, now, what I think of your conduct."

"You'd better defer your opinion to a more convenient season," interrupted he in a low tone—"here's the vicar."

And in truth, the vicar was just behind me, plodding homeward from some remote corner of his parish. I immediately released the Squire; and he went on his way, saluting Mr Millward as he passed.

"What, quarrelling, Markham?" cried the latter, addressing himself to me,—"and about that young widow I doubt," he added, reproachfully shaking his head. "But let me tell you, young man," (here he put his face into mine with an important, confidential air,) "she's not worth it!" and he confirmed the assertion by a solemn nod.

"Mr Millward!" I exclaimed, in a tone of wrathful menace that made the reverend gentleman look round—aghast—astounded at such unwonted insolence, and stare me in the face with a look that plainly said: "What, this to me?" But I was too indignant to apologise, or to speak another word to him: I turned away, and hastened homewards, descending with rapid strides the steep, rough lane, and leaving him to follow as he pleased.

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Chapter xi.

YOU must suppose about three weeks past over. Mrs Graham and I were now established friends—or brother and sister as we rather chose to consider ourselves. She called me Gilbert, by my express desire, and I called her Helen, for I had seen that name written in her books. I seldom attempted to see her above twice a week; and still I made our meetings appear the result of accident as often as I could—for I found it necessary to be extremely careful—and, altogether, I behaved with such exceeding propriety that she never had occasion to reprove me once. Yet I could not but perceive that she was at times unhappy and dissatisfied with herself or her position, and truly I myself was not quite contented with the latter: this assumption of brotherly nonchalance was very hard to sustain, and I often felt myself a most confounded hypocrite with it all: I saw too, or rather I felt, that, in spite of herself, 'I was not indifferent to her,' as the novel heroes modestly express it, and while I thankfully enjoyed my present good fortune, I could not fail to wish and hope for something better in future; but, of course, I kept such dreams entirely to myself.

"Where are you going, Gilbert?" said Rose, one evening, shortly after tea, when I had been busy with the farm all day.

"To take a walk," was the reply.

"Do you always brush your hat so carefully, and do your hair so nicely, and put on such smart new gloves when you take a walk?"

"Not always!"

"You're going to Wildfell Hall, aren't you?"

"What makes you think so?"

"Because you look as if you were—but I wish you wouldn't go so often."

"Nonsense, child! I don't go once in six weeks—what do you mean?"

"Well, but if I were you, I wouldn't have so much to do with Mrs Graham."

"Why, Rose, are you, too, giving in to the prevailing opinion?"

"No," returned she hesitatingly—"but I've heard so much about her lately, both at the Wilsons and the vicarage;—and besides, mamma says, if she were a proper person she would not be living there by herself—and don't you remember last winter, Gilbert, all that about the false name to the picture; and how she explained it—saying she had friends or acquaintances from whom she wished her present residence to be concealed, and that she was afraid of their tracing her out;—and then, how suddenly she started up and left the room when that person came—whom she took good care not to let us catch a glimpse of, and who Arthur, with such an air of mystery, told us was his mamma's friend?"

"Yes, Rose, I remember it all; and I can forgive your uncharitable conclusions; for perhaps, if I did not know her myself, I should put all these things together, and believe the same as you do; but thank God, I do know her; and I should be unworthy the name of a man, if I could believe anything that was said against her, unless I heard it from her own lips.—I should as soon believe such things of you, Rose."

"Oh, Gilbert!"

"Well, do you think I could believe anything of the kind,—whatever the Wilsons and Millwards dared to whisper?"

"I should hope not indeed!"

"And why not?—Because I know you—Well, and I know her just as well."

"Oh, no; you know nothing of her former life; and last year at this time, you did not know that such a person existed."

"No matter. There is such a thing as looking through a person's eyes into the heart, and learning more of the height, and breadth, and depth of another's soul in one hour, than it might take you a lifetime to discover, if he or she were not disposed to reveal it, or if you had not the sense to understand it."

"Then you are going to see her this evening?"

"To be sure I am!"

"But what would mamma say, Gilbert?"

"Mamma needn't know."

"But she must know some time, if you go on."

"Go on!—there's no going on in the matter. Mrs Graham and I are two friends—and will be; and no man breathing shall hinder it,—or has a right to interfere between us."

"But if you knew how they talk, you would be more careful, for her sake as well as for your own. Jane Wilson thinks your visits to the old hall but another proof of her depravity"——

"Confound Jane Wilson!"

"And Eliza Millward is quite grieved about you."

"I hope she is."

"But I wouldn't, if I were you."

"Wouldn't what? How do they know that I go there?"

"There's nothing hid from them: they spy out everything."

"Oh, I never thought of this!—And so they dare to turn my friendship into food for further scandal against her!—That proves the falsehood of their other lies, at all events, if any proof were wanting.—Mind you contradict them, Rose, whenever you can."

"But they don't speak openly to me about such

things: it is only by hints and innuendos, and by what I hear others say, that I knew what they think."

"Well then, I won't go to-day, as it's getting latish. But oh, deuce take their cursed envenomed tongues!" I muttered, in the bitterness of my soul.

And just at that moment the vicar entered the room: we had been too much absorbed in our conversation to observe his knock. After his customary, cheerful, and fatherly greeting of Rose, who was rather a favourite with the old gentleman, he turned somewhat sternly to me—

"Well, sir," said he, "you're quite a stranger. It is—let—me—see," he continued slowly, as he deposited his ponderous bulk in the arm-chair that Rose officiously brought towards him, "it is just—six—weeks—by my reckoning, since you darkened—my—door!" He spoke it with emphasis, and struck his stick on the floor.

"Is it, sir?" said I.

"Ay! It is so!" He added an affirmatory nod, and continued to gaze upon me with a kind of irate solemnity, holding his substantial stick between his knees, with his hands clasped upon his head.

"I have been busy," I said, for an apology was evidently demanded.

"Busy," repeated he derisively.

"Yes, you know I've been getting in my hay; and now the harvest is beginning."

"Humph."

Just then my mother came in, and created a diversion in my favour by her loquacious and animated welcome of the reverend guest. She regretted deeply that he had not come a little earlier, in time for tea, but offered to have some immediately prepared, if he would do her the favour to partake of it.

"Not any for me, I thank you," replied he; "I shall be at home in a few minutes."

"Oh, but do stay and take a little! it will be ready in five minutes."

But he rejected the offer, with a majestic wave of his hand.

"I'll tell you what I'll take, Mrs Markham," said he: "I'll take a glass of your excellent ale."

"With pleasure!" cried my mother, proceeding with alacrity to pull the bell and order the favoured beverage.

"I thought," continued he, "I'd just look in upon you as I passed, and taste your home-brewed ale. I've been to call on Mrs Graham."

"Have you, indeed?"

He nodded gravely, and added with awful emphasis—

"I thought it incumbent upon me to do so."

"Really!" ejaculated my mother.

"Why so, Mr Millward?" asked I. He looked at me with some severity, and turning again to my mother, repeated—

"I thought it incumbent upon me!" and struck his stick on the floor again. My mother sat opposite, an awe-struck but admiring auditor.

"'Mrs Graham,' said I," he continued, shaking his head as he spoke, "'these are terrible reports!' 'What, sir?' says she, affecting to be ignorant of my meaning. 'It is my—duty—as—your pastor,' said I, 'to tell you both everything that I myself see reprehensible in your conduct, and all I have reason to suspect, and what others tell me concerning you.'—So I told her!"

"You did, sir?" cried I, starting from my seat, and striking my fist on the table. He merely glanced towards me, and continued, addressing his hostess—

"It was a painful duty, Mrs Markham—but I told her!"

"And how did she take it?" asked my mother.

"Hardened, I fear—hardened!" he replied, with a despondent shake of the head; "and, at the same time, there was a strong display of unchastened, misdirected passions. She turned white in the face, and drew her breath through her teeth in a savage sort of way;—but she offered no extenuation or defence; and with a kind of shameless calmness—shocking indeed to witness in one so young—as good as told me that my remonstrance was unavailing, and my pastoral advice quite thrown away upon her—nay, that my very presence was displeasing while I spoke such things. And I withdrew at length, too plainly seeing that nothing could be done—and sadly grieved to find her case so hopeless. But I am fully determined, Mrs Markham, that my daughters—shall—not—consort with her. Do you adopt the same resolution with regard to yours!—As for your sons—as for you, young man," he continued, sternly turning to me—

"As for ME, sir," I began, but checked by some impediment in my utterance, and finding that my whole frame trembled with fury, I said no more, but took the wiser part of snatching up my hat and bolting from the room, slamming the door behind me, with a bang that shook the house to its foundations, and made my mother scream, and give a momentary relief to my excited feelings.

The next minute saw me hurrying with rapid strides in the direction of Wildfell Hall—to what intent or purpose I could scarcely tell, but I must be moving somewhere, and no other goal would do—I must see her too, and speak to her—that was certain; but what to say, or how to act, I had no definite idea. Such stormy thoughts—so many different resolutions crowded in upon me, that my mind was little better than a chaos of conflicting passions.

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Chapter xij.

IN little more than twenty minutes, the journey was accomplished. I paused at the gate to wipe my streaming forehead, and recover my breath and some degree of composure. Already the rapid walking had somewhat mitigated my excitement; and with a firm and steady tread, I paced the garden walk. In passing the inhabited wing of the building, I caught a sight of Mrs Graham, through the open window, slowly pacing up and down her lonely room.

She seemed agitated, and even dismayed at my arrival, as if she thought I too was coming to accuse her. I had entered her presence intending to condole with her upon the wickedness of the world, and help her to abuse the vicar and his vile informants, but now I felt positively ashamed to mention the subject, and determined not to refer to it, unless she led the way.

"I am come at an unseasonable hour," said I, assuming a cheerfulness I did not feel, in order to reassure her; "but I won't stay many minutes."

She smiled upon me, faintly it is true, but most kindly —I had almost said thankfully, as her apprehensions were removed.

"How dismal you are, Helen! Why have you no fire?" I said, looking round on the gloomy apartment.

"It is summer yet," she replied.

"But we always have a fire in the evenings, if we can bear it; and you especially require one in this cold house and dreary room."

"You should have come a little sooner, and I would have had one lighted for you; but it is not worth while now, you won't stay many minutes, you say, and Arthur is gone to bed."

"But I have a fancy for a fire, nevertheless. Will you order one, if I ring?"

"Why, Gilbert, you don't look cold?" said she smilingly regarding my face, which no doubt seemed warm enough.

"No," replied I, "but I want to see you comfortable before I go."

"Me comfortable!" repeated she, with a bitter laugh, as if there were something amusingly absurd in the idea. "It suits me better as it is," she added, in a tone of mournful resignation.

But determined to have my own way, I pulled the bell.

"There now, Helen!" I said, as the approaching steps of Rachel were heard in answer to the summons. There was nothing for it but to turn round and desire the maid to light the fire.

I owe Rachel a grudge to this day, for the look she cast upon me ere she departed on her mission, the sour, suspicious, inquisitorial look that plainly demanded, "what are you here for, I wonder?" Her mistress did not fail to notice it, and a shade of uneasiness darkened her brow.

"You must not stay long, Gilbert," said she, when the door was closed upon us.

"I'm not going to," said I, somewhat testily, though without a grain of anger in my heart against any one but the meddling old woman. "But, Helen, I've something to say to you before I go."

"What is it?"

"No, not now—I don't know yet precisely what it is, or how to say it," replied I, with more truth than wisdom; and then, fearing lest she should turn me out of the house, I began talking about indifferent matters in order to gain time. Meanwhile Rachel came in to kindle the fire, which was soon effected by thrusting a

red-hot poker between the bars of the grate, where the fuel was already disposed for ignition. She honoured me with another of her hard, inhospitable looks in departing, but, little moved thereby, I went on talking; and setting a chair for Mrs Graham on one side of the hearth, and one for myself on the other, I ventured to sit down, though half suspecting she would rather see me go.

In a little while we both relapsed into silence, and continued for several minutes gazing abstractedly into the fire—she intent upon her own sad thoughts, and I reflecting how delightful it would be to be seated thus beside her with no other presence to restrain our intercourse—not even that of Arthur, our mutual friend, without whom we had never met before—if only I could venture to speak my mind, and disburden my full heart of the feelings that had so long oppressed it, and which it now struggled to retain, with an effort that it seemed impossible to continue much longer,—and revolving the pros and cons for opening my heart to her there and then, and imploring a return of affection, the permission to regard her thenceforth as my own, and the right and the power to defend her from the calumnies of malicious tongues. On the one hand, I felt a new-born confidence in my powers of persuasion—a strong conviction that my own fervour of spirit would grant me eloquence—that my very determination—the absolute necessity for succeeding, that I felt must win me what I sought; while on the other, I feared to lose the ground I had already gained with so much toil and skill, and destroy all future hope by one rash effort, when time and patience might have won success. It was like setting my life upon the cast of a die; and yet I was ready to resolve upon the attempt. At any rate, I would entreat the explanation she had half promised to give me before; I would demand the reason of this hateful

barrier, this mysterious impediment to my happiness, and, as I trusted, to her own.

But while I considered in what manner I could best frame my request, my companion wakened from her reverie with a scarcely audible sigh, and looking towards the window where the blood-red harvest moon, just rising over one of the grim, fantastic evergreens, was shining in upon us, said—

"Gilbert, it is getting late."

"I see," said I. "You want me to go, I suppose."

"I think you ought. If my kind neighbours get to know of this visit—as no doubt they will—they will not turn it much to my advantage."

It was with what the vicar would doubtless have called a savage sort of a smile that she said this.

"Let them turn it as they will," said I. "What are their thoughts to you or me, so long as we are satisfied with ourselves—and each other. Let them go to the deuce with their vile constructions, and their lying inventions!"

This outburst brought a flush of colour to her face.

"You have heard, then, what they say of me?"

"I heard some detestable falsehoods; but none but fools would credit them for a moment, Helen, so don't let them trouble you."

"I did not think Mr Millward a fool, and he believes it all; but however little you may value the opinions of those about you—however little you may esteem them as individuals, it is not pleasant to be looked upon as a liar and a hypocrite, to be thought to practise what you abhor, and to encourage the vices you would discountenance, to find your good intentions frustrated, and your hands crippled by your supposed unworthiness, and to bring disgrace on the principles you profess."

"True; and if I, by my thoughtlessness and selfish

disregard to appearances, have at all assisted to expose you to these evils, let me entreat you not only to pardon me, but to enable me to make reparation; authorise me to clear your name from every imputation: give me the right to identify your honour with my own, and to defend your reputation as more precious than my life!"

"Are you hero enough to unite yourself to one whom you know to be suspected and despised by all around you, and identify your interests and your honour with hers? Think! it is a serious thing."

"I should be proud to do it, Helen!—most happy—delighted beyond expression!—and if that be all the obstacle to our union, it is demolished, and you must—you shall be mine!"

And starting from my seat in a frenzy of ardour, I seized her hand and would have pressed it to my lips, but she as suddenly caught it away, exclaiming in the bitterness of intense affliction—

"No, no, it is not all!"

"What is it then? You promised I should know some time, and"—

"You shall know some time—but not now—my head aches terribly," she said, pressing her hand to her forehead, "and I must have some repose—and surely, I have had misery enough to-day!" she added, almost wildly.

"But it could not harm you to tell it," I persisted: "it would ease your mind; and I should then know how to comfort you."

She shook her head despondingly. "If you knew all, you, too, would blame me—perhaps even more than I deserve—though I have cruelly wronged you," she added in a low murmur, as if she mused aloud.

"You, Helen? Impossible!"

"Yes, not willingly; for I did not know the strength and depth of your attachment. I thought—at least I

endeavoured to think—your regard for me was as cold and fraternal as you professed it to be."

"Or as yours?"

"Or as mine—ought to have been—of such a light and selfish, superficial nature that"—

"There, indeed, you wronged me."

"I know I did; and sometimes, I suspected it then; but I thought, upon the whole, there could be no great harm in leaving your fancies and your hopes to dream themselves to nothing—or flutter away to some more fitting object, while your friendly sympathies remained with me; but if I had known the depth of your regard, the generous disinterested affection you seem to feel"——

"Seem, Helen?"

"That you do feel, then, I would have acted differently."

"How? You could not have given me less encouragement, or treated me with greater severity than you did! And if you think you have wronged me by giving me your friendship, and occasionally admitting me to the enjoyment of your company and conversation, when all hopes of closer intimacy were vain—as indeed you always gave me to understand—if you think you have wronged me by this, you are mistaken; for such favours, in themselves alone, are not only delightful to my heart, but purifying, exalting, ennobling to my soul; and I would rather have your friendship than the love of any other woman in the world!"

Little comforted by this, she clasped her hands upon her knee, and glancing upward, seemed, in silent anguish, to implore divine assistance; then turning to me, she calmly said—

"To-morrow, if you meet me on the moor about mid-day, I will tell you all you seek to know; and perhaps you will then see the necessity of discontinuing

our intimacy—if, indeed, you do not willingly resign me as one no longer worthy of regard."

"I can safely answer no, to that: you cannot have such grave confessions to make—you must be trying my faith, Helen."

"No, no, no," she earnestly repeated—"I wish it were so! Thank heaven!" she added, "I have no great crime to confess: but I have more than you will like to hear, or, perhaps, can readily excuse,—and more than I can tell you now; so let me entreat you to leave me!"

"I will; but answer me this one question first;—do you love me?"

"I will not answer it!"

"Then I will conclude you do; and so good-night."

She turned from me to hide the emotion she could not quite control; but I took her hand and fervently kissed it.

"Gilbert, do leave me!" she cried, in a tone of such thrilling anguish that I felt it would be cruel to disobey.

But I gave one look back before I closed the door, and saw her leaning forward on the table, with her hands pressed against her eyes, sobbing convulsively; yet I withdrew in silence. I felt that to obtrude my consolations on her then would only serve to aggravate her sufferings.

To tell you all the questionings and conjectures—the fears, and hopes, and wild emotions that jostled and chased each other through my mind as I descended the hill, would almost fill a volume in itself. But before I was half way down a sentiment of strong sympathy for her I had left behind me had displaced all other feelings, and seemed imperatively to draw me back: I began to think, "Why am I hurrying so fast in this direction? Can I find comfort or consolation—peace, certainty, contentment, all—or anything that I want at

home? and can I leave all perturbation, sorrow, and anxiety behind me there?"

And I turned round to look at the old hall. There was little besides the chimneys visible above my contracted horizon. I walked back to get a better view of it. When it rose in sight, I stood still a moment to look, and then continued moving towards the gloomy object of attraction. Something called me nearer—nearer still—and why not, pray? Might I not find more benefit in the contemplation of that venerable pile with the full moon in the cloudless heaven shining so calmly above it—with that warm yellow lustre peculiar to an August night—and the mistress of my soul within, than in returning to my home where all comparatively was light, and life, and cheerfulness, and therefore inimical to me in my present frame of mind,—and the more so that its inmates all were more or less imbued with that detestable belief the very thought of which made my blood boil in my veins—and how could I endure to hear it openly declared—or cautiously insinuated—which was worse?—I had had trouble enough already, with some babbling fiend that would keep whispering in my ear, "It may be true," till I had shouted aloud, "It is false! I defy you to make me suppose it!"

I could see the red firelight dimly gleaming from her parlour window. I went up to the garden wall, and stood leaning over it, with my eyes fixed upon the lattice, wondering what she was doing, thinking, or suffering now, and wishing I could speak to her but one word, or even catch one glimpse of her, before I went.

I had not thus looked, and wished, and wondered long, before I vaulted over the barrier, unable to resist the temptation of taking one glance through the window, just to see if she were more composed than when we

parted;—and if I found her still in deep distress, perhaps I might venture to attempt a word of comfort—to utter one of the many things I should have said before, instead of aggravating her sufferings by my stupid impetuosity. I looked. Her chair was vacant: so was the room. But at that moment some one opened the outer door, and a voice—her voice—said—

"Come out—I want to see the moon, and breathe the evening air: they will do me good—if anything will."

Here, then, were she and Rachel coming to take a walk in the garden. I wished myself back over the wall. I stood, however, in the shadow of the tall holly-bush, which, standing between the window and the porch, at present screened me from observation, but did not prevent me from seeing two figures come forth into the moonlight: Mrs Graham followed by another —not Rachel, but a young man, slender and rather tall. Oh, heavens, how my temples throbbed! Intense anxiety darkened my sight; but I thought—yes, and the voice confirmed it—it was Mr Lawrence.

"You should not let it worry you so much, Helen," said he; "I will be more cautious in future; and in time"——

I did not hear the rest of the sentence; for he walked close beside her and spoke so gently that I could not catch the words. My heart was splitting with hatred; but I listened intently for her reply. I heard it plainly enough.

"But I must leave this place, Frederick," she said —"I never can be happy here,—nor anywhere else, indeed," she added, with a mirthless laugh,—"but I cannot rest here."

"But where could you find a better place?" replied he, "so secluded—so near me, if you think anything of that."

"Yes," interrupted she, "it is all I could wish, if they could only have left me alone."

"But wherever you go, Helen, there will be the same sources of annoyance. I cannot consent to lose you: I must go with you, or come to you; and there are meddling fools elsewhere, as well as here."

While thus conversing, they had sauntered slowly past me, down the walk, and I heard no more of their discourse; but I saw him put his arm round her waist, while she lovingly rested her hand on his shoulder;—and then, a tremulous darkness obscured my sight, my heart sickened and my head burned like fire. I half rushed, half staggered from the spot where horror had kept me rooted, and leaped or tumbled over the wall—I hardly know which—but I know that, afterwards, like a passionate child, I dashed myself on the ground and lay there in a paroxysm of anger and despair—how long, I cannot undertake to say; but it must have been a considerable time; for when, having partially relieved myself by a torrent of tears, and looked up at the moon, shining so calmly and carelessly on, as little influenced by my misery as I was by its peaceful radiance, and earnestly prayed for death or forgetfulness, I had risen and journeyed homewards—little regarding the way, but carried instinctively by my feet to the door, I found it bolted against me, and every one in bed except my mother, who hastened to answer my impatient knocking, and received me with a shower of questions and rebukes.

"Oh, Gilbert, how could you do so? Where have you been? Do come in and take your supper—I've got it all ready, though you don't deserve it, for keeping me in such a fright, after the strange manner you left the house this evening. Mr Millward was quite —— Bless the boy! how ill he looks! Oh, gracious! what is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing—give me a candle."

"But won't you take some supper?"

"No, I want to go to bed," said I, taking a candle and lighting it at the one she held in her hand.

"Oh, Gilbert, how you tremble!" exclaimed my anxious parent. "How white you look!—Do tell me what it is? Has anything happened?"

"It's nothing!" cried I, ready to stamp with vexation because the candle would not light. Then, suppressing my irritation, I added, "I've been walking too fast, that's all. Good night," and marched off to bed, regardless of the "Walking too fast! where have you been?" that was called after me from below.

My mother followed me to the very door of my room, with her questionings and advice concerning my health and my conduct; but I implored her to let me alone till morning; and she withdrew, and at length I had the satisfaction to hear her close her own door. There was no sleep for me, however, that night, as I thought; and instead of attempting to solicit it, I employed myself in rapidly pacing the chamber—having first removed my boots lest my mother should hear me. But the boards creaked, and she was watchful. I had not walked above a quarter of an hour before she was at the door again.

"Gilbert, why are you not in bed—you said you wanted to go?"

"Confound it! I'm going," said I.

"But why are you so long about it? you must have something on your mind"——

"For heaven's sake, let me alone, and get to bed yourself!"

"Can it be that Mrs Graham that distresses you so?"

"No, no, I tell you—it's nothing!"

"I wish to goodness it mayn't!" murmured she, with a sigh, as she returned to her own apartment,

while I threw myself on the bed, feeling most undutifully disaffected towards her for having deprived me of what seemed the only shadow of a consolation that remained, and chained me to that wretched couch of thorns.

Never did I endure so long, so miserable a night as that. And yet, it was not wholly sleepless: towards morning my distracting thoughts began to lose all pretensions to coherency, and shape themselves into confused and feverish dreams, and, at length, there followed an interval of unconscious slumber. But then the dawn of bitter recollection that succeeded—the waking to find life a blank, and worse than a blank—teeming with torment and misery—not a mere barren wilderness, but full of thorns and briars—to find myself deceived, duped, hopeless, my affections trampled upon, my angel not an angel, and my friend a fiend incarnate—it was worse than if I had not slept at all.

It was a dull, gloomy morning, the weather had changed like my prospects, and the rain was pattering against the window. I rose, nevertheless, and went out; not to look after the farm, though that would serve as my excuse, but to cool my brain, and regain, if possible, a sufficient degree of composure to meet the family at the morning meal without exciting inconvenient remarks. If I got a wetting, that, in conjunction with a pretended over exertion before breakfast, might excuse my sudden loss of appetite; and if a cold ensued, the severer the better, it would help to account for the sullen moods and moping melancholy likely to cloud my brow for long enough.

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Chapter xiij.

"MY dear Gilbert! I wish you would try to be a little more amiable," said my mother, one morning after some display of unjustifiable ill-humour on my part. "You say there is nothing the matter with you, and nothing has happened to grieve you, and yet, I never saw any one so altered as you within these last few days: you haven't a good word for anybody—friends and strangers, equals and inferiors—it's all the same. I do wish you'd try to check it."

"Check what?"

"Why, your strange temper. You don't know how it spoils you. I'm sure a finer disposition than yours by nature, could not be, if you'd let it have fair play; so you've no excuse that way."

While she thus remonstrated, I took up a book, and laying it open on the table before me, pretended to be deeply absorbed in its perusal; for I was equally unable to justify myself, and unwilling to acknowledge my errors; and I wished to have nothing to say on the matter. But my excellent parent went on lecturing, and then came to coaxing, and began to stroke my hair; and I was getting to feel quite a good boy, but my mischievous brother, who was idling about the room, revived my corruption by suddenly calling out—

"Don't touch him, mother! he'll bite! He's a very tiger in human form. I've given him up for my part—fairly disowned him—cast him off, root and branch. It's as much as my life is worth to come within six yards of him. The other day he nearly fractured my skull for singing a pretty, inoffensive love song, on purpose to amuse him."

"Oh, Gilbert! how could you?" exclaimed my mother.

"I told you to hold your noise first, you know, Fergus," said I.

"Yes, but when I assured you it was no trouble, and went on with the next verse, thinking you might like it better, you clutched me by the shoulder and dashed me away, right against the wall there, with such force, that I thought I had bitten my tongue in two, and expected to see the place plastered with my brains; and when I put my hand to my head and found my skull not broken, I thought it was a miracle and no mistake. But poor fellow!" added he, with a sentimental sigh —"his heart's broken—that's the truth of it—and his head's"——

"Will you be silent NOW?" cried I, starting up, and eyeing the fellow so fiercely that my mother, thinking I meant to inflict some grievous bodily injury, laid her hand on my arm, and besought me to let him alone, and he walked leisurely out, with his hands in his pockets, singing provokingly — "Shall I, because a woman's fair," &c.

"I'm not going to defile my fingers with him," said I, in answer to the maternal intercession. "I wouldn't touch him with the tongs."

I now recollected that I had business with Robert Wilson, concerning the purchase of a certain field adjoining my farm—a business I had been putting off from day to day; for I had no interest in anything now; and besides, I was misanthropically inclined, and, moreover, had a particular objection to meeting Jane Wilson or her mother; for though I had too good reason, now, to credit their reports concerning Mrs Graham, I did not like them a bit the better for it—or Eliza Millward either—and the thought of meeting them was the more repugnant to me, that I could not, now, defy their seeming calumnies and triumph in my own convictions as before. But to-day, I determined to make an effort to

return to my duty. Though I found no pleasure in it, it would be less irksome than idleness—at all events it would be more profitable. If life promised no enjoyment within my vocation, at least it offered no allurements out of it; and henceforth, I would put my shoulder to the wheel and toil away, like any poor drudge of a cart-horse that was fairly broken in to its labour, and plod through life, not wholly useless if not agreeable, and uncomplaining if not contented with my lot.

Thus resolving, with a kind of sullen resignation, if such a term may be allowed, I wended my way to Ryecote Farm scarcely expecting to find its owner within at this time of day, but hoping to learn in what part of the premises he was most likely to be found.

Absent he was, but expected home in a few minutes; and I was desired to step into the parlour and wait. Mrs Wilson was busy in the kitchen, but the room was not empty; and I scarcely checked an involuntary recoil as I entered it; for there sat Miss Wilson chattering with Eliza Millward. However, I determined to be cool and civil. Eliza seemed to have made the same resolution on her part. We had not met since the evening of the tea-party; but there was no visible emotion either of pleasure or pain, no attempt at pathos, no display of injured pride: she was cool in temper, civil in demeanour. There was even an ease and cheerfulness about her air and manner that I made no pretension to: but there was a depth of malice in her too expressive eye, that plainly told me I was not forgiven; for, though she no longer hoped to win me to herself, she still hated her rival, and evidently delighted to wreak her spite on me. On the other hand, Miss Wilson was as affable and courteous as heart could wish, and though I was in no very conversible humour myself, the two ladies between them managed to keep up a pretty

continuous fire of small talk. But Eliza took advantage of the first convenient pause to ask if I had lately seen Mrs Graham, in a tone of merely casual inquiry, but with a sidelong glance—intended to be playfully mischievous—really, brimful and running over with malice.

"Not lately," I replied, in a careless tone, but sternly repelling her odious glances with my eyes; for I was vexed to feel the colour mounting to my forehead, despite my strenuous efforts to appear unmoved.

"What! are you beginning to tire already? I thought so noble a creature would have power to attach you for a year at least!"

"I would rather not speak of her, now."

"Ah! then you are convinced, at last, of your mistake—you have at length discovered that your divinity is not quite the immaculate"——

"I desired you not to speak of her, Miss Eliza."

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I perceive Cupid's arrows have been too sharp for you: the wounds being more than skin deep, are not yet healed, and bleed afresh at every mention of the loved one's name."

"Say, rather," interposed Miss Wilson, "that Mr Markham feels that name is unworthy to be mentioned in the presence of right-minded females. I wonder, Eliza, you should think of referring to that unfortunate person—you might know the mention of her would be anything but agreeable to any one here present."

How could this be borne? I rose and was about to clap my hat upon my head and burst away, in wrathful indignation, from the house; but recollecting—just in time to save my dignity—the folly of such a proceeding, and how it would only give my fair tormentors a merry laugh at my expense, for the sake of one I acknowledged in my own heart to be unworthy of the slightest sacrifice—though the ghost of my former reverence and love so hung about me still, that I could not bear to hear her

name aspersed by others—I merely walked to the window, and having spent a few seconds in vengibly biting my lips, and sternly repressing the passionate heavings of my chest, I observed to Miss Wilson that I could see nothing of her brother, and added that, as my time was precious, it would perhaps be better to call again to-morrow, at some time when I should be sure to find him at home.

"Oh, no!" said she, "if you wait a minute, he will be sure to come; for he has business at L——" (that was our market town) "and will require a little refreshment before he goes."

I submitted accordingly, with the best grace I could; and, happily, I had not long to wait. Mr Wilson soon arrived, and, indisposed for business as I was at that moment, and little as I cared for the field or its owner, I forced my attention to the matter in hand, with very creditable determination, and quickly concluded the bargain—perhaps more to the thrifty farmer's satisfaction than he cared to acknowledge. Then, leaving him to the discussion of his substantial "refreshment," I gladly quitted the house, and went to look after my reapers.

Leaving them busy at work on the side of the valley, I ascended the hill, intending to visit a cornfield in the more elevated regions, and see when it would be ripe for the sickle. But I did not visit it that day; for, as I approached, I beheld at no great distance Mrs Graham and her son coming down in the opposite direction. They saw me; and Arthur already was running to meet me; but I immediately turned back and walked steadily homeward; for I had fully determined never to encounter his mother again; and regardless of the shrill voice in my ear, calling upon me to "wait a moment," I pursued the even tenor of my way; and he soon relinquished the pursuit as hopeless, or was called away by his mother. At all events, when

I looked back, five minutes after, not a trace of either was to be seen.

This incident agitated and disturbed me most unaccountably—unless you would account for it by saying that Cupid's arrows not only had been too sharp for me, but they were barbed and deeply rooted, and I had not yet been able to wrench them from my heart. However that be, I was rendered doubly miserable for the remainder of the day.

——o——

Chapter xiv.

NEXT morning, I bethought me, I, too, had business at L——; so I mounted my horse and set forth on the expedition, soon after breakfast. It was a dull, drizzly day; but that was no matter: it was all the more suitable to my frame of mind. It was likely to be a lonely journey; for it was no market-day, and the road I traversed was little frequented at any other time; but that suited me all the better too.

As I trotted along, however, chewing the cud of bitter fancies, I heard another horse at no great distance behind me; but I never conjectured who the rider might be, or troubled my head about him, till, on slackening my pace to ascend a gentle acclivity—or rather suffering my horse to slacken his pace into a lazy walk; for, lost in my own reflections, I was letting it jog on as leisurely as it thought proper—I lost ground and my fellow traveller overtook me. He accosted me by name; for it was no stranger—it was Mr Lawrence! Instinctively the fingers of my whip hand tingled, and grasped their charge with convulsive energy; but I restrained the impulse, and answering his salutation with a nod, attempted to push on; but he pushed on beside

me and began to talk about the weather and the crops. I gave the briefest possible answers to his queries and observations, and fell back. He fell back, too, and asked if my horse was lame. I replied with a look—at which he placidly smiled.

I was as much astonished as exasperated at this singular pertinacity and imperturbable assurance on his part. I had thought the circumstances of our last meeting would have left such an impression on his mind as to render him cold and distant ever after: instead of that, he appeared not only to have forgotten all former offences, but to be impenetrable to all present incivilities. Formerly, the slightest hint, or mere fancied coldness in tone or glance, had sufficed to repulse him: now, positive rudeness could not drive him away. Had he heard of my disappointment; and was he come to witness the result, and triumph in my despair? I grasped my whip with more determined energy than before—but still forbore to raise it, and rode on in silence, waiting for some more tangible cause of offence, before I opened the flood-gates of my soul, and poured out the dammed-up fury that was foaming and swelling within.

"Markham," said he, in his usual quiet tone, "why do you quarrel with your friends, because you have been disappointed in one quarter? You have found your hopes defeated; but how am I to blame for it? I warned you beforehand, you know, but you would not"——

He said no more; for, impelled by some fiend at my elbow, I had seized my whip by the small end, and—swift and sudden as a flash of lightning—brought the other down upon his head. It was not without a feeling of savage satisfaction that I beheld the instant, deadly pallor that overspread his face, and the few red drops that trickled down his forehead, while he reeled a

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I brought the end down on his head.

moment in the saddle, and then fell backward to the ground. The pony, surprised to be so strangely relieved of its burden, started and capered, and kicked a little, and then made use of its freedom to go and crop the grass of the hedge bank; while its master lay as still and silent as a corpse. Had I killed him?—an icy hand seemed to grasp my heart and check its pulsation, as I bent over him, gazing with breathless intensity upon the ghastly, upturned face. But no; he moved his eyelids and uttered a slight groan. I breathed again—he was only stunned by the fall. It served him right—it would teach him better manners in future. Should I help him to his horse! No. For any other combination of offences I would; but his were too unpardonable. He might mount it himself, if he liked—in a while: already he was beginning to stir and look about him—and there it was for him, quietly browsing on the roadside.

So with a muttered execration I left the fellow to his fate, and clapping spurs to my own horse, galloped away, excited by a combination of feelings it would not be easy to analyse; and perhaps, if I did so, the result would not be very creditable to my disposition; for I am not sure that a species of exultation in what I had done was not one principal concomitant.

Shortly, however, the effervescence began to abate, and not many minutes elapsed before I had turned and gone back to look after the fate of my victim. It was no generous impulse—no kind relentings that led me to this—nor even the fear of what might be the consequences to myself, if I finished my assault upon the squire by leaving him thus neglected, and exposed to further injury; it was, simply, the voice of conscience; and I took great credit to myself for attending so promptly to its dictates—and judging the merit of the deed by the sacrifice it cost, I was not far wrong.

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I brought the end down on his head.

Mr Lawrence and his pony had both altered their positions in some degree. The pony had wandered eight or ten yards further away; and he had managed, somehow, to remove himself from the middle of the road: I found him seated in a recumbent position on the bank,—looking very white and sickly still, and holding his cambric handkerchief (now more red than white) to his head. It must have been a powerful blow; but half the credit—or the blame of it (which you please) must be attributed to the whip, which was garnished with a massive horse's head of plated metal. The grass, being sodden with rain, afforded the young gentleman a rather inhospitable couch; his clothes were considerably bemired; and his hat was rolling in the mud, on the other side of the road. But his thoughts seemed chiefly bent upon his pony, on which he was wistfully gazing—half in helpless anxiety, and half in hopeless abandonment to his fate.

I dismounted, however, and having fastened my own animal to the nearest tree, first picked up his hat, intending to clap it on his head; but either he considered his head unfit for a hat, or the hat, in its present condition, unfit for his head; for shrinking away the one, he took the other from my hand, and scornfully cast it aside.

"It's good enough for you," I muttered.

My next good office was to catch his pony and bring it to him, which was soon accomplished; for the beast was quiet enough in the main, and only winced and flirted a trifle till I got hold of the bridle—but then, I must see him in the saddle.

"Here, you fellow—scoundrel—dog—give me your hand, and I'll help you to mount."

No; he turned from me in disgust. I attempted to take him by the arm. He shrank away as if there had been contamination in my touch.

"What, you won't. Well! you may sit there till doomsday, for what I care. But I suppose you don't want to lose all the blood in your body—I'll just condescend to bind that up for you."

"Let me alone, if you please."

"Humph! with all my heart. You may go to the d——l, if you choose—and say I sent you."

But before I abandoned him to his fate, I flung his pony's bridle over a stake in the hedge, and threw him my handkerchief, as his own was now saturated with blood. He took it and cast it back to me, in abhorrence and contempt, with all the strength he could muster. It wanted but this to fill the measure of his offences. With execrations not loud but deep, I left him to live or die as he could, well satisfied that I had done my duty in attempting to save him—but forgetting how I had erred in bringing him into such a condition, and how insultingly my after services had been offered—and sullenly prepared to meet the consequences if he should choose to say I had attempted to murder him—which I thought not unlikely, as it seemed probable he was actuated by such spiteful motives in so perseveringly refusing my assistance.

Having remounted my horse, I just looked back to see how he was getting on, before I rode away. He had risen from the ground, and grasping his pony's mane, was attempting to resume his seat in the saddle; but scarcely had he put his foot in the stirrup, when a sickness or dizziness seemed to overpower him: he leant forward a moment, with his head drooped on the animal's back, and then made one more effort, which proving ineffectual, he sank back on the bank where I left him, reposing his head on the oozy turf, and, to all appearance, as calmly reclining as if he had been taking his rest on his sofa at home.

I ought to have helped him in spite of himself—to

have bound up the wound he was unable to staunch, and insisted upon getting him on his horse and seeing him safe home; but, besides my bitter indignation against himself, there was the question what to say to his servants—and what to my own family. Either I should have to acknowledge the deed, which would set me down as a madman, unless I acknowledged the motive too—and that seemed impossible—or I must get up a lie, which seemed equally out of the question—especially as Mr Lawrence would probably reveal the whole truth, and thereby bring me to tenfold disgrace—unless I were villain enough, presuming on the absence of witnesses, to persist in my own version of the case, and make him out a still greater scoundrel than he was. No; he had only received a cut above the temple, and perhaps, a few bruises from the fall, or the hoofs of his own pony: that could not kill him if he lay there half the day; and, if he could not help himself, surely some one would be coming by: it would be impossible that a whole day should pass and no one traverse the road but ourselves. As for what he might choose to say hereafter, I would take my chance about it: if he told lies, I would contradict him; if he told the truth, I would bear it as best I could. I was not obliged to enter into explanations, further than I thought proper. Perhaps, he might choose to be silent on the subject, for fear of raising inquiries as to the cause of the quarrel, and drawing the public attention to his connection with Mrs Graham, which, whether for her sake or his own, he seemed so very desirous to conceal.

Thus reasoning, I trotted away to the town, where I duly transacted my business, and performed various little commissions for my mother and Rose, with very laudable exactitude, considering the different circumstances of the case. In returning home, I was troubled with sundry misgivings about the unfortunate Lawrence. The

question, what if I should find him lying still on the damp earth, fairly dying of cold and exhaustion—or already stark and chill? thrust itself most unpleasantly upon my mind, and the appalling possibility pictured itself with painful vividness to my imagination as I approached the spot where I had left him. But no; thank Heaven, both man and horse were gone, and nothing was left to witness against me but two objects —unpleasant enough in themselves, to be sure, and presenting a very ugly, not to say murderous, appearance —in one place, the hat saturated with rain and coated with mud, indented and broken above the brim by that villanous whip-handle: in another, the crimson handkerchief, soaking in a deeply tinctured pool of water— for much rain had fallen in the interim.

Bad news fly fast: it was hardly four o'clock when I got home, but my mother gravely accosted me with—

"Oh, Gilbert!—such an accident! Rose has been shopping in the village, and she's heard that Mr Lawrence has been thrown from his horse and brought home dying!"

This shocked me a trifle, as you may suppose; but I was comforted to hear that he had frightfully fractured his skull and broken a leg; for, assured of the falsehood of this, I trusted the rest of the story was equally exaggerated; and when I heard my mother and sister so feelingly deploring his condition, I had considerable difficulty in preventing myself from telling them the real extent of the injuries, as far as I knew them.

"You must go and see him to-morrow," said my mother.

"Or to-day," suggested Rose; "there's plenty of time; and you can have the pony, as your horse is tired. Won't you, Gilbert—as soon as you've had something to eat?"

"No, no—How can we tell that it isn't all a false report? It's highly im——"

"Oh, I'm sure it isn't; for the village is all alive about it; and I saw two people that had seen others that had seen the man that found him. That sounds far-fetched; but it isn't so, when you think of it."

"Well, but Lawrence is a good rider; it is not likely he would fall from his horse at all; and if he did, it is highly improbable he would break his bones in that way. It must be a gross exaggeration at least."

"No, but the horse kicked him—or something."

"What, his quiet little pony?"

"How do you know it was that?"

"He seldom rides any other."

"At any rate," said my mother, "you will call to-morrow. Whether it be true or false, exaggerated or otherwise, we shall like to know how he is."

"Fergus may go."

"Why not you?"

"He has more time: I am busy just now."

"Oh! but Gilbert, how can you be so composed about it! You won't mind business, for an hour or two, in a case of this sort—when your friend is at the point of death!"

"He is not, I tell you!"

"For anything you know, he may be! you can't tell till you have seen him. At all events, he must have met with some terrible accident, and you ought to see him: he'll take it very unkind if you don't."

"Confound it! I can't. He and I have not been on good terms of late."

"Oh, my dear boy! Surely, surely, you are not so unforgiving as to carry your little differences to such a length as"——

"Little differences, indeed!" I muttered.

"Well, but only remember the occasion! Think how"——

"Well, well, don't bother me now—I'll see about it," I replied.

And my seeing about it, was to send Fergus next morning, with my mother's compliments, to make the requisite inquiries; for, of course, my going was out of the question—or sending a message either. He brought back intelligence that the young squire was laid up with the complicated evils of a broken head and certain contusions (occasioned by a fall—of which he did not trouble himself to relate the particulars—and the subsequent misconduct of his horse), and a severe cold, the consequence of lying on the wet ground in the rain; but there were no broken bones, and no immediate prospects of dissolution.

It was evident then, that, for Mrs Graham's sake, it was not his intention to criminate me.

——o——

Chapter xb.

THAT day was rainy like its predecessor; but towards evening it began to clear up a little, and the next morning was fair and promising. I was out on the hill with the reapers. A light wind swept over the corn; and all nature laughed in the sunshine. The lark was rejoicing among the silvery floating clouds. The late rain had so sweetly freshened and cleared the air, and washed the sky, and left such glittering gems on branch and blade, that not even the farmers could have the heart to blame it. But no ray of sunshine could reach my heart, no breeze could freshen it; nothing could fill the void my faith, and hope, and joy in Helen Graham had left, or drive away

the keen regrets, and bitter dregs of lingering love that still oppressed it.

While I stood, with folded arms, abstractedly gazing on the undulating swell of the corn not yet disturbed by the reapers, something gently pulled my skirts, and a small voice, no longer welcome to my ears, aroused me with the startling words—

"Mr Markham, mamma wants you."

"Wants me, Arthur?"

"Yes. Why do you look so queer?" said he, half laughing, half frightened at the unexpected aspect of my face in suddenly turning towards him—"and why have you kept so long away?—Come!—Won't you come?"

"I'm busy just now," I replied, scarce knowing what to answer.

He looked up in childish bewilderment; but before I could speak again, the lady herself was at my side.

"Gilbert, I must speak with you!" said she, in a tone of suppressed vehemence.

I looked at her pale cheek and glittering eye, but answered nothing.

"Only for a moment," pleaded she. "Just step aside into this other field," she glanced at the reapers, some of whom were directing looks of impertinent curiosity towards her—"I won't keep you a minute."

I accompanied her through the gap.

"Arthur, darling, run and gather those blue-bells," said she, pointing to some that were gleaming, at some distance, under the hedge along which we walked. The child hesitated, as if unwilling to quit my side. "Go, love!" repeated she, more urgently, and in a tone, which, though not unkind, demanded prompt obedience, and obtained it.

"Well, Mrs Graham?" said I, calmly and coldly;

for, though I saw she was miserable, and pitied her, I felt glad to have it in my power to torment her.

She fixed her eyes upon me with a look that pierced me to the heart; and yet, it made me smile.

"I don't ask the reason of this change, Gilbert," said she, with bitter calmness. "I know it too well; but though I could see myself suspected and condemned by every one else, and bear it with calmness, I cannot endure it from you.—Why did you not come to hear my explanation on the day I appointed to give it?"

"Because I happened, in the interim, to learn all you would have told me—and a trifle more, I imagine."

"Impossible, for I would have told you all!" cried she passionately—"but I won't now, for I see you are not worthy of it!"

And her pale lips quivered with agitation.

"Why not, may I ask?"

She repelled my mocking smile with a glance of scornful indignation.

"Because you never understood me, or you would not soon have listened to my traducers—my confidence would be misplaced in you—you are not the man I thought you—Go! I won't care what you think of me."

She turned away, and I went; for I thought that would torment her as much as anything; and I believe I was right; for, looking back a minute after, I saw her turn half round, as if hoping or expecting to find me still beside her; and then she stood still, and cast one look behind. It was a look less expressive of anger than of bitter anguish and despair: but I immediately assumed an aspect of indifference, and affected to be gazing carelessly round me, and I suppose she went on; for after lingering awhile to see if she would come back or call, I ventured one more glance, and saw her a good

way off, moving rapidly up the field with little Arthur running by her side and apparently talking as he went; but she kept her face averted from him, as if to hide some uncontrollable emotion. And I returned to my business.

But I soon began to regret my precipitancy in leaving her so soon. It was evident she loved me—probably, she was tired of Mr Lawrence, and wished to exchange him for me; and if I had loved and reverenced her less to begin with, the preference might have gratified and amused me; but now, the contrast between her outward seeming and her inward mind, as I supposed,—between my former and my present opinion of her, was so harrowing—so distressing to my feelings, that it swallowed up every lighter consideration.

But still, I was curious to know what sort of an explanation she would have given me,—or would give now, if I pressed her for it—how much she would confess, and how she would endeavour to excuse herself. I longed to know what to despise, and what to admire in her; how much to pity, and how much to hate;—and, what was more, I would know. I would see her once more, and fairly satisfy myself in what light to regard her, before we parted. Lost to me she was, for ever, of course; but still, I could not bear to think that we had parted, for the last time, with so much unkindness and misery on both sides. That last look of hers had sunk into my heart; I could not forget it. But what a fool I was! Had she not deceived me, injured me—blighted my happiness for life? "Well, I'll see her, however," was my concluding resolve,—"but not to-day: to-day and to-night, she may think upon her sins, and be as miserable as she will: to-morrow, I will see her once again, and know something more about her. The interview may be serviceable to her, or it may not. At any rate, it will give a breath of excite-

ment to the life she has doomed to stagnation, and may calm with certainty some agitating thoughts."

I did go on the morrow; but not till towards evening, after the business of the day was concluded, that is, between six and seven; and the westering sun was gleaming redly on the old hall, and flaming in the latticed windows, as I reached it, imparting to the place a cheerfulness not its own. I need not dilate upon the feelings with which I approached the shrine of my former divinity—that spot teeming with a thousand delightful recollections and glorious dreams—all darkened now, by one disastrous truth.

Rachel admitted me into the parlour, and went to call her mistress, for she was not there; but there was her desk left open on the little round table beside the high-backed chair, with a book laid upon it. Her limited but choice collection of books was almost as familiar to me as my own; but this volume I had not seen before. I took it up. It was Sir Humphrey Davy's "Last Days of a Philosopher," and on the first leaf was written,—"Frederick Lawrence." I closed the book, but kept it in my hand, and stood facing the door, with my back to the fireplace, calmly waiting her arrival; for I did not doubt she would come. And soon I heard her step in the hall. My heart was beginning to throb, but I checked it with an internal rebuke, and maintained my composure—outwardly, at least. She entered, calm, pale, collected.

"To what am I indebted for this favour, Mr Markham?" said she, with such severe but quiet dignity as almost disconcerted me; but I answered with a smile, and impudently enough—

"Well, I am come to hear your explanation."

"I told you I would not give it," said she. "I said you were unworthy of my confidence."

"Oh, very well," replied I, moving to the door.

"Stay a moment," said she. "This is the last time I shall see you: don't go just yet."

I remained awaiting her further commands.

"Tell me," resumed she, "on what grounds you believe these things against me; who told you; and what did they say?"

I paused a moment. She met my eye as unflinchingly as if her bosom had been steeled with conscious innocence. She was resolved to know the worst, and determined to dare it too. "I can crush that bold spirit," thought I. But while I secretly exulted in my power, I felt disposed to dally with my victim like a cat. Showing her the book that I still held in my hand, and pointing to the name on the fly-leaf, but fixing my eye upon her face, I asked—

"Do you know that gentleman?"

"Of course I do," replied she; and a sudden flush suffused her features—whether of shame or anger I could not tell: it rather resembled the latter. "What next, sir?"

"How long is it since you saw him?"

"Who gave you the right to catechise me, on this or any other subject?"

"Oh, no one!—it's quite at your option whether to answer or not. And now, let me ask—have you heard what has lately befallen this friend of yours?—because, if you have not"——

"I will not be insulted, Mr Markham!" cried she, almost infuriated at my manner. "So you had better leave the house at once, if you came only for that."

"I did not come to insult you: I came to hear your explanation."

"And I tell you I won't give it!" retorted she, pacing the room in a state of strong excitement, with her hands clasped tightly together, breathing short, and flashing fires of indignation from her eyes. "I will

not condescend to explain myself to one that can make a jest of such horrible suspicions, and be so easily led to entertain them."

"I do not make a jest of them, Mrs Graham," returned I, dropping at once my tone of taunting sarcasm. "I heartily wish I could find them a jesting matter! And as to being easily led to suspect, God only knows what a blind incredulous fool I have hitherto been, perseveringly shutting my eyes and stopping my ears against everything that threatened to shake my confidence in you, till proof itself confounded my infatuation!"

"What proof, sir?"

"Well, I'll tell you. You remember that evening when I was here last?"

"I do."

"Even then, you dropped some hints that might have opened the eyes of a wiser man; but they had no such effect upon me: I went on trusting and believing, hoping against hope, and adoring where I could not comprehend. It so happened, however, that after I left you, I turned back—drawn by pure depth of sympathy, and ardour of affection—not daring to intrude my presence openly upon you, but unable to resist the temptation of catching one glimpse through the window, just to see how you were; for I had left you apparently in great affliction, and I partly blamed my own want of forbearance and discretion as the cause of it. If I did wrong, love alone was my incentive, and the punishment was severe enough; for it was just as I had reached that tree, that you came out into the garden with your friend. Not choosing to show myself, under the circumstances, I stood still, in the shadow, till you had both passed by."

"And how much of our conversation did you hear?"

"I heard quite enough, Helen. And it was well for

me that I did hear it; for nothing less could have cured my infatuation. I always said and thought, that I would never believe a word against you, unless I heard it from your own lips. All the hints and affirmations of others I treated as malignant, baseless slanders; your own self-accusations I believed to be over-strained; and all that seemed unaccountable in your position, I trusted that you could account for if you chose."

Mrs Graham had discontinued her walk. She leant against one end of the chimney-piece, opposite that near which I was standing, with her chin resting on her closed hand, her eyes—no longer burning with anger, but gleaming with restless excitement—sometimes glancing at me while I spoke, then coursing the opposite wall, or fixed upon the carpet.

"You should have come to me, after all," said she, "and heard what I had to say in my own justification. It was ungenerous and wrong to withdraw yourself so secretly and suddenly, immediately after such ardent protestations of attachment, without ever assigning a reason for the change. You should have told me all—no matter how bitterly. It would have been better than this silence."

"To what end should I have done so? You could not have enlightened me further, on the subject which alone concerned me; nor could you have made me discredit the evidence of my senses. I desired our intimacy to be discontinued at once, as you yourself had acknowledged would probably be the case if I knew all; but I did not wish to upbraid you,—though (as you also acknowledged) you had deeply wronged me. Yes; you have done me an injury you can never repair —or any other either—you have blighted the freshness and promise of youth, and made my life a wilderness! I might live a hundred years, but I could never recover

from the effects of this withering blow—and never forget it! Hereafter—— You smile, Mrs Graham," said I, suddenly stopping short, checked in my passionate declamation by unutterable feelings to behold her actually smiling at the picture of the ruin she had wrought.

"Did I?" replied she, looking seriously up; "I was not aware of it. If I did, it was not for pleasure at the thoughts of the harm I had done you. Heaven knows I have had torment enough at the bare possibility of that;—it was for joy to find that you had some depth of soul and feeling after all, and to hope that I had not been utterly mistaken in your worth. But smiles and tears are so alike with me; they are neither of them confined to any particular feelings: I often cry when I am happy, and smile when I am sad."

She looked at me again, and seemed to expect a reply; but I continued silent.

"Would you be very glad," resumed she, "to find that you were mistaken in your conclusions?"

"How can you ask it, Helen?"

"I don't say I can clear myself altogether," said she, speaking low and fast, while her heart beat visibly and her bosom heaved with excitement,—"but would you be glad to discover I was better than you think me?"

"Anything, that could, in the least degree, tend to restore my former opinion of you, to excuse the regard I still feel for you, and alleviate the pangs of unutterable regret that accompany it, would be only too gladly —too eagerly received!"

Her cheeks burned and her whole frame trembled, now, with excess of agitation. She did not speak, but flew to her desk, and snatching thence what seemed a thick album or manuscript volume, hastily tore away a few leaves from the end, and thrust the rest into my

hand, saying, "You needn't read it all; but take it home with you," and hurried from the room. But when I had left the house, and was proceeding down the walk, she opened the window and called me back. It was only to say—

"Bring it back when you have read it; and don't breathe a word of what it tells you to any living being. I trust to your honour."

Before I could answer, she had closed the casement and turned away. I saw her cast herself back in the old oak chair, and cover her face with her hands. Her feelings had been wrought to a pitch that rendered it necessary to seek relief in tears.

Panting with eagerness, and struggling to suppress my hopes, I hurried home, and rushed upstairs to my room, having first provided myself with a candle, though it was scarcely twilight yet—then, shut and bolted the door, determined to tolerate no interruption; and sitting down before the table, opened out my prize and delivered myself up to its perusal—first, hastily turning over the leaves, and snatching a sentence here and there, and then, setting myself steadily to read it through.

I have it now before me; and though you could not, of course, peruse it with half the interest that I did, I know you would not be satisfied with an abbreviation of its contents, and you shall have the whole, save, perhaps, a few passages here and there of merely temporal interest to the writer, or such as would serve to encumber the story rather than elucidate it. It begins somewhat abruptly, thus—but we will reserve its commencement for another chapter, and call it—

———o———

Chapter xvj.

June 1st, 1821.

WE have just returned to Staningley—that is, we returned some days ago, and I am not yet settled, and feel as if I never should be. We left town sooner than was intended, in consequence of my uncle's indisposition—I wonder what would have been the result if we had stayed the full time. I am quite ashamed of my new-sprung distaste for country life. All my former occupations seem so tedious and dull, my former amusements so insipid and unprofitable. I cannot enjoy my music, because there is no one to hear it. I cannot enjoy my walks, because there is no one to meet. I cannot enjoy my books, because they have not power to arrest my attention—my head is so haunted with the recollections of the last few weeks, that I cannot attend to them. My drawing suits me best, for I can draw and think at the same time; and if my productions cannot now be seen by any one but myself and those who do not care about them, they, possibly, may be, hereafter. But then, there is one face I am always trying to paint or to sketch, and always without success; and that vexes me. As for the owner of that face, I cannot get him out of my mind—and, indeed, I never try. I wonder whether he ever thinks of me; and I wonder whether I shall ever see him again. And then might follow a train of other wonderments—questions for time and fate to answer—concluding with:—supposing all the rest be answered in the affirmative, I wonder whether I shall ever repent it—as my aunt would tell me I should, if she knew what I was thinking about. How distinctly I remember our conversation that evening before our departure for town, when we were sitting together over the fire, my uncle having gone to bed with a slight attack of the gout.

"Helen," said she, after a thoughtful silence, "do you ever think about marriage?"

"Yes, aunt, often."

"And do you ever contemplate the possibility of being married yourself, or engaged, before the season is over?"

"Sometimes; but I don't think it at all likely that I ever shall."

"Why so?"

"Because, I imagine there must be only a very, very few men in the world, that I should like to marry; and of those few, it is ten to one I may never be acquainted with one: or if I should, it is twenty to one, he may not happen to be single, or to take a fancy to me."

"That is no argument at all. It may be very true—and I hope is true, that there are very few men whom you would choose to marry, of yourself. It is not, indeed, to be supposed, that you would wish to marry any one, till you were asked: a girl's affections should never be won unsought. But when they are sought—when the citadel of the heart is fairly besieged—it is apt to surrender sooner than the owner is aware of, and often against her better judgment, and in opposition to all her preconceived ideas of what she could have loved, unless she be extremely careful and discreet. Now, I want to warn you, Helen, of these things, and to exhort you to be watchful and circumspect from the very commencement of your career, and not to suffer your heart to be stolen from you by the first foolish or unprincipled person that covets the possession of it.—You know, my dear, you are only just eighteen; there is plenty of time before you, and neither your uncle nor I are in any hurry to get you off our hands, and I may venture to say, there will be no lack of suitors; for you can boast a good family, a pretty considerable fortune and ex-

pectations, and, I may as well tell you likewise—for, if I don't, others will—that you have a fair share of beauty, besides—and I hope you may never have cause to regret it!"

"I hope not, aunt; but why should you fear it?"

"Because, my dear, beauty is that quality which, next to money, is generally the most attractive to the worst kinds of men; and, therefore, it is likely to entail a great deal of trouble on the possessor."

"Have you been troubled in that way, aunt?"

"No, Helen," said she, with reproachful gravity, "but I know many that have; and some, through carelessness, have been the wretched victims of deceit; and some, through weakness, have fallen into snares and temptations, terrible to relate."

"Well, I shall be neither careless nor weak."

"Remember Peter, Helen! Don't boast, but watch. Keep a guard over your eyes and ears as the inlets of your heart, and over your lips as the outlet, lest they betray you in a moment of unwariness. Receive, coldly and dispassionately, every attention, till you have ascertained and duly considered the worth of the aspirant; and let your affections be consequent upon approbation alone. First study; then approve; then love. Let your eyes be blind to all external attractions, your ears deaf to all the fascinations of flattery and light discourse. —These are nothing—and worse than nothing—snares and wiles of the tempter, to lure the thoughtless to their own destruction. Principle is the first thing, after all; and next to that, good sense, respectability, and moderate wealth. If you should marry the handsomest, and most accomplished and superficially agreeable man in the world, you little know the misery that would overwhelm you, if, after all, you should find him to be a worthless reprobate, or even an impracticable fool."

"But what are all the poor fools and reprobates to do,

aunt? If everybody followed your advice, the world would soon come to an end."

"Never fear, my dear! the male fools and reprobates will never want for partners, while there are so many of the other sex to match them; but do you follow my advice. And this is no subject for jesting, Helen—I am sorry to see you treat the matter in that light way. Believe me, matrimony is a serious thing." And she spoke it so seriously, that one might have fancied she had known it to her cost; but I asked no more impertinent questions, and merely answered—

"I know it is; and I know there is truth and sense in what you say; but you need not fear me, for I not only should think it wrong to marry a man that was deficient in sense or in principle, but I should never be tempted to do it; for I could not like him, if he were ever so handsome, and ever so charming, in other respects; I should hate him—despise him—pity him—anything but love him. My affections not only ought to be founded on approbation, but they will and must be so: for, without approving, I cannot love. It is needless to say, I ought to be able to respect and honour the man I marry, as well as love him, for I cannot love him without. So set you mind at rest."

"I hope it may be so," answered she.

"I know it is so," persisted I.

"You have not been tried yet, Helen—we can but hope," said she, in her cold, cautious way.

I was vexed at her incredulity; but I am not sure her doubts were entirely without sagacity; I fear I have found it much easier to remember her advice than to profit by it; — indeed I have sometimes been led to question the soundness of her doctrines on those subjects. Her counsels may be good as far as they go—in the main points, at least; but there are some things she has overlooked in her calculations. I wonder if she was ever in love.

I commenced my career—or my first campaign, as my uncle calls it—kindling with bright hopes and fancies—chiefly raised by this conversation—and full of confidence in my own discretion. At first, I was delighted with the novelty and excitement of our London life; but soon I began to weary of its mingled turbulence and constraint, and sigh for the freshness and freedom of home. My new acquaintances, both male and female, disappointed my expectations, and vexed and depressed me by turns; for I soon grew tired of studying their peculiarities, and laughing at their foibles—particularly as I was obliged to keep my criticisms to myself, for my aunt would not hear them—and they—the ladies especially—appeared so provokingly mindless, and heartless, and artificial. The gentlemen seemed better, but, perhaps, it was because I knew them less—perhaps, because they flattered me; but I did not fall in love with any of them; and, if their attentions pleased me one moment, they provoked me the next, because they put me out of humour with myself, by revealing my vanity, and making me fear I was becoming like some of the ladies I so heartily despised.

There was one elderly gentleman that annoyed me very much; a rich old friend of my uncle's, who, I believe, thought I could not do better than marry him; but, besides being old, he was ugly and disagreeable,—and wicked, I am sure, though my aunt scolded me for saying so; but she allowed he was no saint. And there was another, less hateful, but still more tiresome, because she favoured him, and was always thrusting him upon me, and sounding his praises in my ears, Mr Boarham, by name, Bore'em, as I prefer spelling it, for a terrible bore he was: I shudder still, at the remembrance of his voice, drone, drone, drone, in my ear, while he sat beside me, prosing away by the half-hour together, and beguiling himself with the notion that he

was improving my mind by useful information, or impressing his dogmas upon me, and reforming my errors of judgment, or, perhaps, that he was talking down to my level, and amusing me with entertaining discourse. Yet he was a decent man enough, in the main, I dare say; and if he had kept his distance, I never would have hated him. As it was, it was almost impossible to help it; for he not only bothered me with the infliction of his own presence, but he kept me from the enjoyment of more agreeable society.

One night, however, at a ball, he had been more than usually tormenting, and my patience was quite exhausted. It appeared as if the whole evening was fated to be insupportable: I had just had one dance with an empty-headed coxcomb, and then Mr Boarham had come upon me and seemed determined to cling to me for the rest of the night. He never danced himself, and there he sat, poking his head in my face, and impressing all beholders with the idea that he was a confirmed, acknowledged lover; my aunt looking complacently on, all the time, and wishing him God-speed. In vain I attempted to drive him away by giving a loose to my exasperated feelings, even to positive rudeness: nothing could convince him that his presence was disagreeable. Sullen silence was taken for rapt attention, and gave him greater room to talk; sharp answers were received as smart sallies of girlish vivacity, that only required an indulgent rebuke; and flat contradictions were but as oil to the flames, calling forth new strains of argument to support his dogmas, and bringing down upon me endless floods of reasoning to overwhelm me with conviction.

But there was one present who seemed to have a better appreciation of my frame of mind. A gentleman stood by, who had been watching our conference for some time, evidently much amused at my companion's

remorseless pertinacity and my manifest annoyance, and laughing to himself at the asperity and uncompromising spirit of my replies. At length, however, he withdrew, and went to the lady of the house, apparently for the purpose of asking an introduction to me, for, shortly after, they both came up, and she introduced him as Mr Huntingdon, the son of a late friend of my uncle's. He asked me to dance. I gladly consented, of course; and he was my companion during the remainder of my stay, which was not long, for my aunt, as usual, insisted upon an early departure.

I was sorry to go, for I had found my new acquaintance a very lively and entertaining companion. There was a certain graceful ease and freedom about all he said and did, that gave a sense of repose and expansion to the mind, after so much constraint and formality as I had been doomed to suffer. There might be, it is true, a little too much careless boldness in his manner and address, but I was in so good a humour, and so grateful for my late deliverance from Mr Boarham, that it did not anger me.

"Well, Helen, how do you like Mr Boarham now?" said my aunt, as we took our seats in the carriage and drove away.

"Worse than ever," I replied.

She look displeased, but said no more on that subject.

"Who was the gentleman you danced with last," resumed she after a pause—"that was so officious in helping you on with your shawl?"

"He was not officious at all, aunt: he never attempted to help me, till he saw Mr Boarham coming to do so; and then he stepped laughingly forward and said, 'Come, I'll preserve you from that infliction.'"

"Who was it, I ask?" said she, with frigid gravity.

"It was Mr Huntingdon, the son of uncle's old friend."

"I have heard your uncle speak of young Mr Huntingdon. I've heard him say, 'He's a fine lad, that young Huntingdon, but a bit wildish, I fancy.' So I'd have you beware."

"What does 'a bit wildish' mean?" I inquired.

"It means destitute of principle, and prone to every vice that is common to youth."

"But I've heard uncle say he was a sad wild fellow himself, when he was young."

She sternly shook her head.

"He was jesting then, I suppose," said I, "and here he was speaking at random—at least, I cannot believe there is any harm in those laughing blue eyes."

"False reasoning, Helen!" said she, with a sigh.

"Well, we ought to be charitable, you know, aunt—besides, I don't think it is false: I am an excellent physiognomist, and I always judge of people's characters by their looks—not by whether they are handsome or ugly, but by the general cast of the countenance. For instance, I should know by your countenance that you were not of a cheerful, sanguine disposition; and I should know by Mr Wilmot's that he was a worthless old reprobate, and by Mr Boarham's that he was not an agreeable companion, and by Mr Huntingdon's that he was neither a fool nor a knave, though, possibly, neither a sage nor a saint—but that is no matter to me, as I am not likely to meet him again—unless as an occasional partner in the ball-room."

It was not so, however, for I met him again next morning. He came to call upon my uncle, apologising for not having done so before, by saying he was only lately returned from the Continent, and had not heard, till the previous night, of my uncle's arrival in town;

and after that, I often met him; sometimes in public, sometimes at home; for he was very assiduous in paying his respects to his old friend, who did not, however, consider himself greatly obliged by the attention.

"I wonder what the deuce the lad means by coming so often?" he would say,—"can you tell, Helen?—Hey? He wants none o' my company, nor I his—that's certain."

"I wish you'd tell him so, then," said my aunt.

"Why, what for? If I don't want him, somebody does mayhap (winking at me). Besides, he's a pretty tidy fortune, Peggy, you know—not such a catch as Wilmot, but then Helen won't hear of that match; for, somehow, these old chaps don't go down with the girls—with all their money—and their experience to boot. I'll bet anything she'd rather have this young fellow without a penny, than Wilmot with his house full of gold—Wouldn't you, Nell?"

"Yes, uncle; but that's not saying much for Mr Huntingdon, for I'd rather be an old maid and a pauper, than Mrs Wilmot."

"And Mrs Huntingdon? What would you rather be than Mrs Huntingdon? eh?"

"I'll tell you when I've considered the matter."

"Ah! it needs consideration then. But come, now—would you rather be an old maid—let alone the pauper?"

"I can't tell till I'm asked."

And I left the room immediately, to escape further examination. But five minutes after, in looking from my window, I beheld Mr Boarham, coming up to the door. I waited nearly half-an-hour in uncomfortable suspense, expecting every minute to be called, and vainly longing to hear him go. Then, footsteps were heard on the stairs, and my aunt entered the room with a solemn countenance, and closed the door behind her.

"Here is Mr Boarham, Helen," said she. "He wishes to see you."

"Oh, aunt! Can't you tell him I'm indisposed? I'm sure I am—to see him."

"Nonsense, my dear! this is no trifling matter. He is come on a very important errand—to ask your hand in marriage of your uncle and me."

"I hope my uncle and you told him it was not in your power to give it. What right had he to ask any one before me?"

"Helen!"

"What did my uncle say?"

"He said he would not interfere in the matter; if you liked to accept Mr Boarham's obliging offer, you"——

"Did he say obliging offer?"

"No; he said if you liked to take him you might; and if not, you might please yourself."

"He said right; and what did you say?"

"It is no matter what I said. What will you say?—that is the question. He is now waiting to ask you himself; but consider well before you go; and if you intend to refuse him, give me your reasons."

"I shall refuse him, of course, but you must tell me how, for I want to be civil and yet decided—and when I've got rid of him I'll give you my reasons afterwards."

"But stay, Helen; sit down a little, and compose yourself. Mr Boarham is in no particular hurry, for he has little doubt of your acceptance; and I want to speak with you. Tell me, my dear, what are your objections to him? Do you deny that he is an upright, honourable man?"

"No."

"Do you deny that he is a sensible, sober, respectable?"

"No; he may be all this, but"——

"But, Helen! How many such men do you expect to meet with in the world! Upright, honourable, sensible, sober, respectable!—Is this such an every-day character, that you should reject the possessor of such noble qualities, without a moment's hesitation?—Yes, noble, I may call them; for, think of the full meaning of each, and how many inestimable virtues they include (and I might add many more to the list), and consider that all this is laid at your feet; it is in your power to secure this inestimable blessing for life—a worthy and excellent husband, who loves you tenderly, but not too fondly so as to blind him to your faults, and will be your guide throughout life's pilgrimage, and your partner in eternal bliss! Think how"——

"But I hate him, aunt," said I, interrupting this unusual flow of eloquence.

"Hate him, Helen! Is this a Christian spirit?—you hate him?—and he so good a man!"

"I don't hate him as a man, but as a husband. As a man, I love him so much, that I wish him a better wife than I—one as good as himself, or better—if you think that possible—provided, she could like him; but I never could, and therefore"——

"But why not? What objection do you find?"

"Firstly, he is, at least, forty years old—considerably more I should think, and I am but eighteen: secondly, he is narrow-minded and bigoted in the extreme; thirdly, his tastes and feelings are wholly dissimilar to mine; fourthly, his looks, voice, and manner are particularly displeasing to me; and finally, I have an aversion to his whole person that I never can surmount."

"Then you ought to surmount it! And please to compare him for a moment with Mr Huntingdon, and,

good looks apart (which contribute nothing to the merit of the man, or to the happiness of married life, and which you have so often professed to hold in light esteem), tell me which is the better man."

"I have no doubt Mr Huntingdon is a much better man than you think him—but we are not talking about him, now, but about Mr Boarham; and as I would rather grow, live and die in single blessedness than be his wife, it is but right that I should tell him so at once, and put him out of suspense—so let me go."

"But don't give him a flat denial; he has no idea of such a thing, and it would offend him greatly: say you have no thoughts of matrimony, at present"——

"But I have thoughts of it."

"Or that you desire a further acquaintance."

"But I don't desire a further acquaintance—quite the contrary."

And without waiting for further admonitions, I left the room, and went to seek Mr Boarham. He was walking up and down the drawing-room, humming snatches of tunes, and nibbling the end of his cane.

"My dear young lady," said he, bowing and smirking with great complacency, "I have your kind guardian's permission"——

"I know, sir," said I, wishing to shorten the scene as much as possible, "and I am greatly obliged for your preference, but must beg to decline the honour you wish to confer; for, I think, we were not made for each other—as you yourself would shortly discover if the experiment were tried."

My aunt was right: it was quite evident he had had little doubt of my acceptance, and no idea of a positive denial. He was amazed—astounded at such an answer, but too incredulous to be much offended; and after a litle humming and hawing, he returned to the attack.

"I know, my dear, that there exists a considerable disparity between us in years, in temperament, and perhaps some other things; but let me assure you, I shall not be severe to mark the faults and foibles of a young and ardent nature such as yours, and while I acknowledge them to myself, and even rebuke them with all a father's care, believe me, no youthful lover could be more tenderly indulgent towards the object of his affections, than I to you; and, on the other hand, let me hope that my more experienced years and graver habits of reflection will be no disparagement in your eyes, as I shall endeavour to make them all conducive to your happiness. Come now! What do you say? —Let us have no young lady's affectations and caprices, but speak out at once!"

"I will, but only to repeat what I said before, that I am certain we were not made for each other."

"You really think so?"

"I do."

"But, you don't know me—you wish for a further acquaintance—a longer time to"——

"No, I don't. I know you as well as I ever shall, and better than you know me, or you would never dream of uniting yourself to one so incongruous—so utterly unsuitable to you in every way."

"But, my dear young lady, I don't look for perfection, I can excuse"——

"Thank you, Mr Boarham, but I won't trespass upon your goodness. You may save your indulgence and consideration for some more worthy object, that won't tax them so heavily."

"But let me beg you to consult your aunt; that excellent lady, I am sure, will"——

"I have consulted her; and I know her wishes coincide with yours; but in such important matters, I take the liberty of judging for myself; and no persua-

sion can alter my inclinations, or induce me to believe that such a step would be conducive to my happiness, or yours—and I wonder that a man of your experience and discretion should think of choosing such a wife."

"Ah, well!" said he, "I have sometimes wondered at that myself. I have sometimes said to myself, 'Now, Boarham, what is this you're after? Take care, man—look before you leap! This is a sweet, bewitching creature, but remember, the brightest attractions to the lover, too often prove the husband's greatest torments!' I assure you my choice has not been made without much reasoning and reflection. The seeming imprudence of the match has cost me many an anxious thought by day, and many a sleepless hour by night; but at length, I satisfied myself, that it was not, in very deed, imprudent. I saw my sweet girl was not without her faults, but of these, her youth, I trusted, was not one, but rather an earnest of virtues yet unblown —a strong ground of presumption that her little defects of temper, and errors of judgment, opinion, or manner were not irremediable, but might easily be removed or mitigated by the patient efforts of a watchful and judicious adviser, and where I failed to enlighten and control, I thought I might safely undertake to pardon, for the sake of her many excellences. Therefore, my dearest girl, since I am satisfied, why should you object —on my account, at least?"

"But to tell you the truth, Mr Boarham, it is on my own account I principally object; so let us——drop the subject," I would have said, "for it is worse than useless to pursue it any further," but he pertinaciously interrupted me with—

"But why so? I would love you, cherish you, protect you," &c., &c.

I shall not trouble myself to put down all that passed between us. Suffice it to say, that I found him very

troublesome, and very hard to convince that I really meant what I said, and really was so obstinate and blind to my own interests, that there was no shadow of a chance that either he or my aunt would ever be able to overcome my objections. Indeed, I am not sure that I succeeded after all, though, wearied with his so pertinaciously returning to the same point and repeating the same arguments over and over again, forcing me to reiterate the same replies, I at length turned short and sharp upon him, and my last words were—

"I tell you plainly, that it cannot be. No consideration can induce me to marry against my inclinations. I respect you—at least, I would respect you, if you would behave like a sensible man—but I cannot love you, and never could—and the more you talk the further you repel me; so pray don't say any more about it."

Whereupon, he wished me a good morning and withdrew, disconcerted and offended, no doubt; but surely it was not my fault.

Chapter xvij.

THE next day, I accompanied my uncle and aunt to a dinner-party at Mr Wilmot's. He had two ladies staying with him, his niece Annabella, a fine dashing girl, or rather young woman, of some five-and-twenty, too great a flirt to be married, according to her own assertion, but greatly admired by the gentlemen, who universally pronounced her a splendid woman,—and her gentle cousin Milicent Hargrave, who had taken a violent fancy to me, mistaking me for something vastly better than I was. And I, in return, was very fond of her. I should entirely

exclude poor Milicent in my general animadversions against the ladies of my acquaintance. But it was not on her account, or her cousin's, that I have mentioned the party: it was for the sake of another of Mr Wilmot's guests, to wit Mr Huntingdon. I have good reason to remember his presence there, for this was the last time I saw him.

He did not sit near me at dinner; for it was his fate to hand in a capacious old dowager, and mine to be handed in by Mr Grimbsy, a friend of his, but a man I very greatly disliked: there was a sinister cast in his countenance, and a mixture of lurking ferocity and fulsome insincerity in his demeanour, that I could not away with. What a tiresome custom that is, by-the-bye—one among the many sources of factitious annoyance of this ultra-civilised life. If the gentlemen must lead the ladies into the dining-room, why cannot they take those they like best?

I am not sure, however, that Mr Huntingdon would have taken me, if he had been at liberty to make his own selection. It is quite possible he might have chosen Miss Wilmot; for she seemed bent upon engrossing his attention to herself, and he seemed nothing loath to pay the homage she demanded. I thought so, at least, when I saw how they talked and laughed, and glanced across the table to the neglect and evident umbrage of their respective neighbours—and afterwards, as the gentlemen joined us in the drawing-room, when she, immediately upon his entrance, loudly called upon him to be the arbiter of a dispute between herself and another lady, and he answered the summons with alacrity, and decided the question without a moment's hesitation in her favour—though, to my thinking, she was obviously in the wrong—and then stood chatting familiarly with her and a group of other ladies; while I sat with Milicent

Hargrave at the opposite end of the room, looking over the latter's drawings, and aiding her with my critical observations and advice, at her particular desire. But in spite of my efforts to remain composed, my attention wandered from the drawings to the merry group, and against my better judgment my wrath rose, and doubtless my countenance lowered; for Milicent, observing that I must be tired of her daubs and scratches, begged I would join the company now, and defer the examination of the remainder to another opportunity. But while I was assuring her that I had no wish to join them, and was not tired, Mr Huntingdon himself came up to the little round table at which we sat.

"Are these yours?" said he, carelessly taking up one of the drawings.

"No, they are Miss Hargrave's."

"Oh! well, let's have a look at them."

And, regardless of Miss Hargrave's protestations that they were not worth looking at, he drew a chair to my side, and receiving the drawings, one by one, from my hand, successively scanned them over, and threw them on the table, but said not a word about them, though he was talking all the time. I don't know what Milicent Hargrave thought of such conduct, but I found his conversation extremely interesting, though, as I afterwards discovered, when I came to analyse it, it was chiefly confined to quizzing the different members of the company present; and albeit he made some clever remarks, and some excessively droll ones, I do not think the whole would appear anything very particular, if written here, without the adventitious aids of look, and tone, and gesture, and that ineffable but indefinite charm, which cast a halo over all he did and said, and which would have made it a delight to look in his face, and hear the music of his voice, if he had been talking positive nonsense—and which, moreover, made me feel

so bitter against my aunt when she put a stop to this enjoyment, by coming composedly forward, under pretence of wishing to see the drawings, that she cared and knew nothing about, and while making believe to examine them, addressing herself to Mr Huntingdon, with one of her coldest and most repellent aspects, and beginning a series of the most commonplace and formidably formal questions and observations, on purpose to wrest his attention from me—on purpose to vex me, as I thought: and having now looked through the portfolio, I left them to their *tête-à-tête*, and seated myself on a sofa, quite apart from the company—never thinking how strange such conduct would appear, but merely to indulge, at first, the vexation of the moment, and subsequently to enjoy my private thoughts.

But I was not left long alone, for Mr Wilmot, of all men the least welcome, took advantage of my isolated position to come and plant himself beside me. I had flattered myself that I had so effectually repulsed his advances on all former occasions, that I had nothing more to apprehend from his unfortunate predilection; but it seems I was mistaken: so great was his confidence, either in his wealth or his remaining powers of attraction, and so firm his conviction of feminine weakness, that he thought himself warranted to return to the siege, which he did with renovated ardour, enkindled by the quantity of wine he had drunk—a circumstance that rendered him infinitely the more disgusting; but greatly as I abhorred him at that moment, I did not like to treat him with rudeness, as I was now his guest and had just been enjoying his hospitality; and I was no hand at a polite but determined rejection, nor would it have greatly availed me if I had; for he was too coarse-minded to take any repulse that was not as plain and positive as his own effrontery. The consequence was, that he waxed more fulsomely tender, and more re-

pulsively warm, and I was driven to the very verge of desperation, and about to say, I know not what, when I felt my hand, that hung over the arm of the sofa, suddenly taken by another and gently but fervently pressed. Instinctively, I guessed who it was, and, on looking up, was less surprised than delighted to see Mr Huntingdon smiling upon me. It was like turning from some purgatorial fiend to an angel of light, come to announce that the season of torment was past.

"Helen," said he (he frequently called me Helen, and I never resented the freedom), "I want you to look at this picture: Mr Wilmot will excuse you a moment, I'm sure."

I rose with alacrity. He drew my arm within his, and led me across the room to a splendid painting of Vandyke's that I had noticed before, but not sufficiently examined. After a moment of silent contemplation, I was beginning to comment on its beauties and peculiarities, when, playfully pressing the hand he still retained within his arm, he interrupted me with—

"Never mind the picture, it was not for that I brought you here; it was to get you away from that scoundrelly old profligate yonder, who is looking as if he would like to challenge me for the affront."

"I am very much obliged to you," said I. "This is twice you have delivered me from such unpleasant companionship."

"Don't be too thankful," he answered: "it is not all kindness to you; it is partly from a feeling of spite to your tormentors that makes me delighted to do the old fellows a bad turn, though I don't think I have any great reason to dread them as rivals. Have I, Helen?"

"You know I detest them both."

"And me?"

"I have no reason to detest you."

"But what are your sentiments towards me? Helen? —Speak! How do you regard me?"

And again he pressed my hand; but I feared there was more of conscious power than tenderness in his demeanour, and I felt he had no right to extort a confession of attachment from me when he had made no correspondent avowal himself, and knew not what to answer. At last I said—

"How do you regard me?"

"Sweet angel, I adore you! I"——

"Helen, I want you a moment," said the distinct, low voice of my aunt, close beside us. And I left him, muttering maledictions against his evil angel.

"Well, aunt, what is it? What do you want?" said I, following her to the embrasure of the window.

"I want you to join the company, when you are fit to be seen," returned she, severely regarding me; "but please to stay here a little till that shocking colour is somewhat abated, and your eyes have recovered something of their natural expression. I should be ashamed for any one to see you in your present state."

Of course, such a remark had no effect in reducing the "shocking colour;" on the contrary, I felt my face glow with redoubled fires kindled by a complication of emotions, of which indignant, swelling anger was the chief. I offered no reply, however, but pushed aside the curtain and looked into the night—or rather into the lamp-lit square.

"Was Mr Huntingdon proposing to you, Helen?" inquired my too watchful relative.

"No."

"What was he saying then? I heard something very like it."

"I don't know what he would have said, if you hadn't interrupted him."

"And would you have accepted him, Helen, if he had proposed?"

"Of course not—without consulting uncle and you."

"Oh! I'm glad, my dear, you have so much prudence left. Well, now," she added, after a moment's pause, "you have made yourself conspicuous enough for one evening. The ladies are directing inquiring glances towards us at this moment I see. I shall join them. Do you come too, when you are sufficiently composed to appear as usual."

"I am so now."

"Speak gently then; and don't look so malicious," said my calm, but provoking aunt. "We shall return home shortly, and then," she added, with solemn significance, "I have much to say to you."

So I went home prepared for a formidable lecture. Little was said by either party in the carriage during our short transit homewards; but when I had entered my room and thrown myself into an easy-chair to reflect on the events of the day, my aunt followed me thither, and having dismissed Rachel, who was carefully stowing away my ornaments, closed the door; and placing a chair beside me, or rather at right angles with mine, sat down. With due deference I offered her my more commodious seat. She declined it, and thus opened the conference—

"Do you remember, Helen, our conversation the night but one before we left Staningley?"

"Yes, aunt."

"And do you remember how I warned you against letting your heart be stolen from you by those unworthy of its possession; and fixing your affections where approbation did not go before, and where reason and judgment withheld their sanction?"

"Yes, but my reason"——

"Pardon me—and do you remember assuring me

that there was no occasion for uneasiness on your account; for you should never be tempted to marry a man who was deficient in sense or principle, however handsome or charming in other respects he might be, for you could not love him, you should hate—despise—pity—anything but love him—were not those your words?"

"Yes, but"——

"And did you not say that your affection must be founded on approbation; and that unless you could approve and honour and respect, you could not love?"

"Yes, but I do approve, and honour, and respect"——

"How so, my dear? Is Mr Huntingdon a good man?"

"He is a much better man than you think him."

"That is nothing to the purpose. Is he a good man?"

"Yes—in some respects. He has a good disposition."

"Is he a man of principle?"

"Perhaps not, exactly; but it is only for want of thought: if he had some one to advise him, and remind him of what is right"——

"He would soon learn, you think—and you yourself would willingly undertake to be his teacher? But, my dear, he is, I believe, full ten years older than you—how is it that you are so before-hand in moral acquirements?"

"Thanks to you, aunt, I have been well brought up, and had good examples always before me, which he, most likely, has not; and besides, he is of a sanguine temperament, and a gay, thoughtless temper, and I am naturally inclined to reflection."

"Well, now you have made him out to be deficient in both sense and principle, by your own confession"——

"Then, my sense and my principle are at his service!"

"That sounds presumptuous, Helen! Do you think you have enough for both; and do you imagine your merry, thoughtless profligate would allow himself to be guided by a young girl like you?"

"No; I should not wish to guide him; but I think I might have influence sufficient to save him from some errors, and I should think my life well spent in the effort to preserve so noble a nature from destruction. He always listens attentively now, when I speak seriously to him (and I often venture to reprove his random way of talking), and sometimes he says that if he had me always by his side he should never do or say a wicked thing, and that a little daily talk with me would make him quite a saint. It may be partly jest and partly flattery, but still"——

"But still you think it may be truth?"

"If I do think there is any mixture of truth in it, it is not from confidence in my own powers, but in his natural goodness. And you have no right to call him a profligate, aunt; he is nothing of the kind."

"Who told you so, my dear? What was that story about his intrigue with a married lady—Lady who was it—Miss Wilmot herself was telling you the other day?"

"It was false—false!" I cried. "I don't believe a word of it."

"You think, then, that he is a virtuous, well-conducted young man?"

"I know nothing positive respecting his character. I only know that I have heard nothing definite against it—nothing that could be proved, at least; and till people can prove their slanderous accusations, I will not believe them. And I know this, that if he has committed errors, they are only such as are common to

youth, and such as nobody thinks anything about; for I see that everybody likes him, and all the mammas smile upon him, and their daughters—and Miss Wilmot herself—are only too glad to attract his attention."

"Helen, the world may look upon such offences as venial; a few unprincipled mothers may be anxious to catch a young man of fortune without reference to his character; and thoughtless girls may be glad to win the smiles of so handsome a gentleman, without seeking to penetrate beyond the surface; but you, I trusted, were better informed than to see with their eyes, and judge with their perverted judgment. I did not think you would call these venial errors!"

"Nor do I, aunt; but if I hate the sins I love the sinner, and would do much for his salvation, even supposing your suspicions to be mainly true—which I do not and will not believe."

"Well, my dear, ask your uncle what sort of company he keeps, and if he is not banded with a set of loose, profligate young men, whom he calls his friends—his jolly companions, and whose chief delight is to wallow in vice, and vie with each other who can run fastest and furthest down the headlong road to the place prepared for the devil and his angels."

"Then, I will save him from them."

"Oh, Helen, Helen! you little know the misery of uniting your fortunes to such a man!"

"I have such confidence in him, aunt, notwithstanding all you say, that I would willingly risk my happiness for the chance of securing his. I will leave better men to those who only consider their own advantage. If he has done amiss, I shall consider my life well spent in saving him from the consequences of his early errors, and striving to recall him to the path of virtue. God grant me success!"

Here the conversation ended, for at this juncture my

uncle's voice was heard, from his chamber, loudly calling upon my aunt to come to bed. He was in a bad humour that night; for his gout was worse. It had been gradually increasing upon him ever since we came to town; and my aunt took advantage of the circumstance, next morning, to persuade him to return to the country immediately, without waiting for the close of the season. His physician supported and enforced her arguments; and contrary to her usual habits, she so hurried the preparations for removal (as much for my sake as my uncle's, I think), that in a very few days we departed; and I saw no more of Mr Huntingdon. My aunt flatters herself I shall soon forget him—perhaps, she thinks I have forgotten him, already, for I never mention his name; and she may continue to think so, till we meet again—if ever that should be. I wonder if it will.

———o———

Chapter xviij.

August 25th.

I AM now quite settled down to my usual routine of steady occupations and quiet amusements—tolerably contented and cheerful, but still looking forward to spring with the hope of returning to town, not for its gaieties and dissipations, but for the chance of meeting Mr Huntingdon once again; for still, he is always in my thoughts and in my dreams. In all my employments, whatever I do, or see, or hear, has an ultimate reference to him; whatever skill or knowledge I acquire is some day to be turned to his advantage or amusement; whatever new beauties in nature or art I discover, are to be depicted to meet his eye, or stored in my memory to be told him at some future period. This, at least, is the hope that I cherish, the fancy that lights

me on my lonely way. It may be only an ignis fatuus, after all, but it can do no harm to follow it with my eyes and rejoice in its lustre, as long as it does not lure me from the path I ought to keep; and I think it will not, for I have thought deeply on my aunt's advice, and I see clearly, now, the folly of throwing myself away on one that is unworthy of all the love I have to give, and incapable of responding to the best and deepest feelings of my inmost heart—so clearly, that even if I should see him again, and if he should remember me and love me still (which, alas! is too little probable, considering how he is situated, and by whom surrounded), and if he should ask me to marry him—I am determined not to consent until I know for certain whether my aunt's opinion of him or mine is nearest the truth; for if mine is altogether wrong, it is not he that I love; it is a creature of my own imagination. But I think it is not wrong—no, no—there is a secret something—an inward instinct that assures me I am right. There is essential goodness in him;—and what delight to unfold it! If he has wandered, what bliss to recall him! If he is now exposed to the baneful influence of corrupting and wicked companions, what glory to deliver him from them! Oh! if I could but believe that Heaven has designed me for this!

. . . . . .

To-day is the 1st of September; but my uncle has ordered the gamekeeper to spare the partridges till the gentlemen come. "What gentlemen?" I asked when I heard it—a small party he had invited to shoot. His friend Mr Wilmot was one, and my aunt's friend Mr Boarham another. This struck me as terrible news, at the moment, but all regret and apprehension vanished like a dream when I heard that Mr Huntingdon was actually to be a third! My aunt is greatly against his coming, of course: she earnestly endeavoured to dis-

suade my uncle from asking him; but he, laughing at her objections, told her it was no use talking, for the mischief was already done: he had invited Huntingdon and his friend Lord Lowborough before we left London, and nothing now remained but to fix the day for their coming. So he is safe, and I am sure of seeing him. I cannot express my joy. I find it very difficult to conceal it from my aunt; but I don't wish to trouble her with my feelings till I know whether I ought to indulge them or not. If I find it my absolute duty to suppress them, they shall trouble no one but myself; and if I can really feel myself justified in indulging this attachment, I can dare anything, even the anger and grief of my best friend, for its object—surely, I shall soon know. But they are not coming till about the middle of the month.

We are to have two lady visitors also: Mr Wilmot is to bring his niece and her cousin Milicent. I suppose, my aunt thinks the latter will benefit me by her society and the salutary example of her gentle deportment, and lowly and tractable spirit; and the former, I suspect, she intends as a species of counter attraction to win Mr Huntingdon's attention from me. I don't thank her for this; but I shall be glad of Milicent's company: she is a sweet, good girl, and I wish I were like her—more like her, at least, than I am.

. . . . . .

19*th*.—They are come. They came the day before yesterday. The gentlemen are all gone out to shoot, and the ladies are with my aunt, at work, in the drawing-room. I have retired to the library, for I am very unhappy, and I want to be alone. Books cannot divert me; so having opened my desk, I will try what may be done by detailing the cause of my uneasiness. This paper will serve instead of a confidential friend into whose ear I might pour forth the overflowings of

my heart. It will not sympathise with my distresses, but then, it will not laugh at them, and, if I keep it close, it cannot tell again; so it is, perhaps, the best friend I could have for the purpose.

First, let me speak of his arrival—how I sat at my window, and watched for nearly two hours, before his carriage entered the park gates—for they all came before him,—and how deeply I was disappointed at every arrival, because it was not his. First came Mr Wilmot and the ladies. When Milicent had got into her room, I quitted my post a few minutes, to look in upon her, and have a little private conversation, for she was now my intimate friend, several long epistles having passed between us since our parting. On returning to my window, I beheld another carriage at the door. Was it his? No; it was Mr Boarham's plain, dark chariot; and there stood he upon the steps, carefully superintending the dislodging of his various boxes and packages. What a collection! one would have thought he projected a visit of six months at least. A considerable time after, came Lord Lowborough in his barouche. Is he one of the profligate friends, I wonder? I should think not; for no one could call him a jolly companion, I'm sure,—and besides, he appears too sober and gentlemanly in his demeanour, to merit such suspicions. He is a tall, thin, gloomy-looking man, apparently between thirty and forty, and of a somewhat sickly, careworn aspect.

At last, Mr Huntingdon's light phaeton came bowling merrily up the lawn. I had but a transient glimpse of him, for the moment it stopped, he sprang out over the side on to the portico steps, and disappeared into the house.

I now submitted to be dressed for dinner—a duty which Rachel had been urging upon me for the last twenty minutes; and when that important business was

completed, I repaired to the drawing-room, where I found Mr and Miss Wilmot, and Milicent Hargrave, already assembled. Shortly after, Lord Lowborough entered, and then Mr Boarham, who seemed quite willing to forget and forgive my former conduct, and to hope that a little conciliation and steady perseverance on his part might yet succeed in bringing me to reason. While I stood at the window, conversing with Milicent, he came up to me, and was beginning to talk in nearly his usual strain, when Mr Huntingdon entered the room.

"How will he greet me, I wonder?" said my bounding heart; and, instead of advancing to meet him, I turned to the window to hide or subdue my emotion. But having saluted his host and hostess, and the rest of the company, he came to me, ardently squeezed my hand, and murmured he was glad to see me once again. At that moment dinner was announced, my aunt desired him to take Miss Hargrave into the dining-room, and odious Mr Wilmot, with unspeakable grimaces, offered his arm to me; and I was condemned to sit between himself and Mr Boarham. But, afterwards, when we were all again assembled in the drawing-room, I was indemnified for so much suffering by a few delightful minutes of conversation with Mr Huntingdon.

In the course of the evening, Miss Wilmot was called upon to sing and play for the amusement of the company, and I to exhibit my drawings, and, though he likes music, and she is an accomplished musician, I think I am right in affirming, that he paid more attention to my drawings than to her music.

So far, so good;—but, hearing him pronounce, sotto voce, but with peculiar emphasis, concerning one of the pieces, "This is better than all!"—I looked up, curious to see which it was, and, to my horror, beheld him complacently gazing at the back of the picture:—

it was his own face that I had sketched there, and forgotten to rub out! To make matters worse, in the agony of the moment, I attempted to snatch it from his hand; but he prevented me, and exclaiming, "No—by George, I'll keep it!" placed it against his waistcoat, and buttoned his coat upon it with a delighted chuckle.

Then, drawing a candle close to his elbow, he gathered all the drawings to himself, as well what he had seen as the others, and muttering, "I must look at both sides now," he eagerly commenced an examination, which I watched, at first, with tolerable composure, in the confidence that his vanity would not be gratified by any further discoveries; for, though I must plead guilty to having disfigured the backs of several with abortive attempts to delineate that too fascinating physiognomy, I was sure that, with that one unfortunate exception, I had carefully obliterated all such witnesses of my infatuation. But the pencil frequently leaves an impression upon card-board, that no amount of rubbing can efface. Such, it seems, was the case with most of these; and, I confess, I trembled, when I saw him holding them so close to the candle, and poring so intently over the seeming blanks; but still, I trusted, he would not be able to make out these dim traces to his own satisfaction. I was mistaken, however—having ended his scrutiny, he quietly remarked—

"I perceive the backs of young ladies' drawings, like the postscripts of their letters, are the most important and interesting part of the concern."

Then, leaning back in his chair, he reflected a few minutes in silence, complacently smiling to himself, and, while I was concocting some cutting speech wherewith to check his gratification, he rose, and passing over to where Annabella Wilmot sat vehemently coquetting with Lord Lowborough, seated himself on the sofa

beside her, and attached himself to her for the rest of the evening.

"So then!" thought I—"he despises me, because he knows I love him."

And the reflection made me so miserable—I knew not what to do. Milicent came and began to admire my drawings, and make remarks upon them; but I could not talk to her—I could talk to no one; and, upon the introduction of tea, I took advantage of the open door and the slight diversion caused by its entrance, to slip out—for I was sure I could not take any—and take refuge in the library. My aunt sent Thomas in quest of me, to ask if I were not coming to tea; but I bade him say, I should not take any to-night; and, happily, she was too much occupied with her guests, to make any further inquiries at the time.

As most of the company had travelled far that day, they retired early to rest; and having heard them all, as I thought, go upstairs, I ventured out, to get my candlestick from the drawing-room side-board. But Mr Huntingdon had lingered behind the rest: he was just at the foot of the stairs, when I opened the door; and, hearing my step in the hall—though I could hardly hear it myself—he instantly turned back.

"Helen, is that you?" said he; "why did you run away from us?"

"Good night, Mr Huntingdon," said I coldly, not choosing to answer the question. And I turned away to enter the drawing-room.

"But you'll shake hands, won't you?" said he, placing himself in the doorway, before me. And he seized my hand, and held it much against my will.

"Let me go, Mr Huntingdon!" said I—"I want to get a candle."

"The candle will keep," returned he.

I made a desperate effort to free my hand from his grasp.

"Why are you in such a hurry to leave me, Helen?" he said, with a smile of the most provoking self-sufficiency—"you don't hate me, you know."

"Yes, I do—at this moment."

"Not you! It is Annabella Wilmot you hate, not me."

"I have nothing to do with Annabella Wilmot," said I, burning with indignation.

"But I have, you know," returned he, with peculiar emphasis.

"That is nothing to me, sir!" I retorted.

"Is it nothing to you, Helen?—Will you swear it?—Will you?"

"No, I won't, Mr Huntingdon! and I will go!" cried I, not knowing whether to laugh, or to cry, or to break out into a tempest of fury.

"Go, then, you vixen!" he said; but the instant he released my hand, he had the audacity to put his arm round my neck, and kiss me.

Trembling with anger and agitation—and I don't know what besides, I broke away, and got my candle, and rushed upstairs to my room. He would not have done so, but for that hateful picture! And there he had it still in his possession, an eternal monument to his pride and my humiliation!

It was but little sleep I got that night; and, in the morning, I rose perplexed and troubled with the thoughts of meeting him at breakfast. I knew not how it was to be done—an assumption of dignified, cold indifference would hardly do, after what he knew of my devotion—to his face, at least. Yet something must be done to check his presumption—I would not submit to be tyrannised over by those bright, laughing eyes. And, accordingly, I received his cheerful morn-

ing salutation as calmly and coldly as my aunt could have wished, and defeated with brief answers his one or two attempts to draw me into conversation; while I comported myself with unusual cheerfulness and complaisance towards every other member of the party, especially Annabella Wilmot, and even her uncle and Mr Boarham were treated with an extra amount of civility on the occasion, not from any motives of coquetry, but just to show him that my particular coolness and reserve arose from no general ill-humour or depression of spirits.

He was not, however, to be repelled by such acting as this. He did not talk much to me, but when he did speak it was with a degree of freedom and openness—and kindliness too—that plainly seemed to intimate he knew his words were music to my ears; and when his looks met mine it was with a smile—presumptuous it might be—but oh, so sweet, so bright, so genial, that I could not possibly retain my anger; every vestige of displeasure soon melted away beneath it like morning clouds before the summer sun.

Soon after breakfast all the gentlemen save one, with boyish eagerness, set out on their expedition against the hapless partridges; my uncle and Mr Wilmot on their shooting ponies, Mr Huntingdon and Lord Lowborough on their legs: the one exception being Mr Boarham, who, in consideration of the rain that had fallen during the night, thought it prudent to remain behind a little and join them in a while when the sun had dried the grass. And he favoured us all with a long and minute disquisition upon the evils and dangers attendant upon damp feet, delivered with the most imperturbable gravity, amid the jeers and laughter of Mr Huntingdon and my uncle, who, leaving the prudent sportsman to entertain the ladies with his medical discussions, sallied forth with their guns, bending their

steps to the stables first to have a look at the horses and let out the dogs.

Not desirous of sharing Mr Boarham's company for the whole of the morning, I betook myself to the library, and there brought forth my easel and began to paint. The easel and the painting apparatus would serve as an excuse for abandoning the drawing-room if my aunt should come to complain of the desertion, and besides I wanted to finish the picture. It was one I had taken great pains with, and I intended it to be my masterpiece, though it was somewhat presumptuous in the design. By the bright azure of the sky, and by the warm and brilliant lights and deep long shadows, I had endeavoured to convey the idea of a sunny morning. I had ventured to give more of the bright verdure of spring or early summer to the grass and foliage than is commonly attempted in painting. The scene represented was an open glade in a wood. A group of dark Scotch firs was introduced in the middle distance to relieve the prevailing freshness of the rest; but in the foreground were part of the gnarled trunk and of the spreading boughs of a large forest tree, whose foliage was of a brilliant golden green—not golden from autumnal mellowness, but from the sunshine and the very immaturity of the scarce expanded leaves. Upon this bough, that stood out in bold relief against the sombre firs, were seated an amorous pair of turtle doves, whose soft sad-coloured plumage afforded a contrast of another nature; and beneath it a young girl was kneeling on the daisy-spangled turf with head thrown back and masses of fair hair falling on her shoulders, her hands clasped, lips parted, and eyes intently gazing upward in pleased yet earnest contemplation of those feathered lovers—too deeply absorbed in each other to notice her.

I had scarcely settled to my work, which, however,

wanted but a few touches to the finishing, when the sportsmen passed the window on their return from the stables. It was partly open, and Mr Huntingdon must have seen me as he went by, for in half a minute he came back, and setting his gun against the wall threw up the sash and sprang in and set himself before my picture.

"Very pretty, i'faith;" said he, after attentively regarding it for a few seconds; "and a very fitting study for a young lady. Spring just opening into summer—morning just approaching noon—girlhood just ripening into womanhood, and hope just verging on fruition. She's a sweet creature! but why didn't you make her black hair?"

"I thought light hair would suit her better. You see I have made her blue-eyed and plump, and fair and rosy."

"Upon my word—a very Hebe! I should fall in love with her if I hadn't the artist before me. Sweet innocent! she's thinking there will come a time when she will be wooed and won like that pretty hen-dove by as fond and fervent a lover; and she's thinking how pleasant it will be, and how tender and faithful he will find her."

"And, perhaps," suggested I, "how tender and faithful she shall find him."

"Perhaps, for there is no limit to the wild extravagance of Hope's imaginings at such an age."

"Do you call that, then, one of her wild, extravagant delusions?"

"No; my heart tells me it is not. I might have thought so once, but now, I say, give me the girl I love, and I will swear eternal constancy to her and her alone, through summer and winter, through youth and age, and life and death! if age and death must come."

He spoke this in such serious earnest that my heart

bounded with delight; but the minute after he changed his tone, and asked, with a significant smile, if I had "any more portraits."

"No," replied I, reddening with confusion and wrath. But my portfolio was on the table: he took it up, and coolly sat down to examine its contents.

"Mr Huntingdon, those are my unfinished sketches," cried I, "and I never let any one see them."

And I placed my hand on the portfolio to wrest it from him, but he maintained his hold, assuring me that he "liked unfinished sketches of all things."

"But I hate them to be seen," returned I. "I can't let you have it, indeed!"

"Let me have its bowels then," said he; and just as I wrenched the portfolio from his hand he deftly abstracted the greater part of its contents, and after turning them over a moment he cried out—

"Bless my stars, here's another!" and slipped a small oval of ivory paper into his waistcoat pocket—a complete miniature portrait that I had sketched with such tolerable success as to be induced to colour it with great pains and care. But I was determined he should not keep it.

"Mr Huntingdon," cried I, "I insist upon having that back! It is mine, and you have no right to take it. Give it me, directly—I'll never forgive you if you don't!"

But the more vehemently I insisted, the more he aggravated my distress by his insulting gleeful laugh. At length, however, he restored it to me, saying—

"Well, well, since you value it so much, I'll not deprive you of it."

To show him how I valued it I tore it in two and threw it into the fire. He was not prepared for this. His merriment suddenly ceasing, he stared in mute amazement at the consuming treasure; and then with a

careless "Humph! I'll go and shoot now," he turned on his heel, and vacated the apartment by the window as he came, and setting on his hat with an air, took up his gun and walked away, whistling as he went—and leaving me not too much agitated to finish my picture, for I was glad, at the moment, that I had vexed him.

When I returned to the drawing-room, I found Mr Boarham had ventured to follow his comrades to the field; and shortly after lunch, to which they did not think of returning, I volunteered to accompany the ladies in a walk, and show Annabella and Milicent the beauties of the country. We took a long ramble, and re-entered the park just as the sportsmen were returning from their expedition. Toil-spent and travel-stained, the main body of them crossed over the grass to avoid us, but Mr Huntingdon, all spattered and splashed as he was, and stained with the blood of his prey—to the no small offence of my aunt's strict sense of propriety—came out of his way to meet us with cheerful smiles and words for all but me, and placing himself between Annabella Wilmot and myself walked up the road and began to relate the various exploits and disasters of the day, in a manner that would have convulsed me with laughter if I had been on good terms with him; but he addressed himself entirely to Annabella, and I, of course, left all the laughter and all the badinage to her, and affecting the utmost indifference to whatever passed between them, walked along a few paces apart, and looking every way but theirs, while my aunt and Milicent went before, linked arm in arm, and gravely discoursing together. At length Mr Huntingdon turned to me, and addressing me in a confidential whisper, said—

"Helen, why did you burn my picture?"

"Because I wished to destroy it," I answered, with an asperity it is useless now to lament.

"Oh, very good!" was the reply, "if you don't value me, I must turn to somebody that will."

I thought it was partly in jest—a half-playful mixture of mock resignation and pretended indifference: but immediately he resumed his place beside Miss Wilmot, and from that hour to this—during all that evening, and all the next day, and the next, and the next, and all this morning (the 22nd), he has never given me one kind word or one pleasant look—never spoken to me, but from pure necessity—never glanced towards me but with a cold unfriendly look I thought him quite incapable of assuming.

My aunt observes the change, and though she has not inquired the cause or made any remark to me on the subject, I see it gives her pleasure. Miss Wilmot observes it, too, and triumphantly ascribes it to her own superior charms and blandishments; but I am truly miserable—more so than I like to acknowledge to myself. Pride refuses to aid me. It has brought me into the scrape, and will not help me out of it.

He meant no harm—it was only his joyous, playful spirit; and I, by my acrimonious resentment — so serious, so disproportioned to the offence — have so wounded his feelings—so deeply offended him, that I fear he will never forgive me—and all for a mere jest! He thinks I dislike him, and he must continue to think so. I must lose him for ever, and Annabella may win him, and triumph as she will.

But it is not my loss nor her triumph that I deplore so greatly as the wreck of my fond hopes for his advantage, and her unworthiness of his affection, and the injury he will do himself by trusting his happiness to her. She does not love him: she thinks only of herself. She cannot appreciate the good that is in him: she will neither see it, nor value it, nor cherish it. She will neither deplore his faults nor attempt their amend-

ment, but rather aggravate them by her own. And I doubt whether she will not deceive him after all. I see she is playing double between him and Lord Lowborough, and while she amuses herself with the lively Huntingdon she tries her utmost to enslave his moody friend; and should she succeed in bringing both to her feet, the fascinating commoner will have but little chance against the lordly peer. If he observes her artful by-play it gives him no uneasiness, but rather adds new zest to his diversion by opposing a stimulating check to his otherwise too easy conquest.

Messrs Wilmot and Boarham have severally taken occasion by his neglect of me to renew their advances; and if I were like Annabella and some others I should take advantage of their perseverance to endeavour to pique him into a revival of affection; but, justice and honesty apart, I could not bear to do it; I am annoyed enough by their present persecutions without encouraging them further; and even if I did it would have precious little effect upon him. He sees me suffering under the condescending attentions and prosaic discourses of the one, and the repulsive obtrusions of the other, without so much as a shadow of commiseration for me, or resentment against my tormentors. He never could have loved me, or he would not have resigned me so willingly, and he would not go on talking to everybody else so cheerfully as he does—laughing and jesting with Lord Lowborough and my uncle, teasing Milicent Hargrave, and flirting with Annabella Wilmot—as if nothing were on his mind. Oh, why can't I hate him? I must be infatuated, or I should scorn to regret him as I do! But I must rally all the powers I have remaining, and try to tear him from my heart. There goes the dinner bell, and here comes my aunt to scold me for sitting here at my desk all day instead of staying with the company: wish the company were—gone.

Chapter xix.

TWENTY-SECOND. Night—what have I done? and what will be the end of it? I cannot calmly reflect upon it; I cannot sleep. I must have recourse to my diary again; I will commit it to paper to-night, and see what I shall think of it to-morrow.

I went down to dinner resolving to be cheerful and well-conducted, and kept my resolution very creditably, considering how my head ached, and how internally wretched I felt—I don't know what is come over me of late; my very energies, both mental and physical, must be strangely impaired, or I should not have acted so weakly in many respects as I have done;—but I have not been well this last day or two: I suppose it is with sleeping and eating so little, and thinking so much, and being so continually out of humour. But to return: I was exerting myself to sing and play for the amusement, and at the request, of my aunt and Milicent, before the gentlemen came into the drawing-room (Miss Wilmot never likes to waste her musical efforts on ladies' ears alone): Milicent had asked for a little Scotch song, and I was just in the middle of it when they entered. The first thing Mr Huntingdon did, was to walk up to Annabella.

"Now, Miss Wilmot, won't you give us some music to-night?" said he. "Do now! I know you will, when I tell you that I have been hungering and thirsting all day for the sound of your voice. Come! the piano's vacant.

It was; for I had quitted it immediately upon hearing his petition. Had I been endowed with a proper degree of self-possession, I should have turned to the lady myself, and cheerfully joined my entreaties to his;

whereby I should have disappointed his expectations, if the affront had been purposely given, or made him sensible of the wrong, if it had only arisen from thoughtlessness; but I felt it too deeply to do anything but rise from the music-stool, and throw myself back on the sofa, suppressing with difficulty the audible expression of the bitterness I felt within. I knew Annabella's musical talents were superior to mine, but that was no reason why I should be treated as a perfect nonentity. The time and the manner of his asking her, appeared like a gratuitous insult to me; and I could have wept with pure vexation.

Meantime, she exultingly seated herself at the piano, and favoured him with two of his favourite songs, in such superior style that even I soon lost my anger in admiration, and listened with a sort of gloomy pleasure to the skillful modulations of her full-toned and powerful voice, so judiciously aided by her rounded and spirited touch; and while my ears drank in the sound, my eyes rested on the face of her principal auditor, and derived an equal or superior delight from the contemplation of his speaking countenance, as he stood beside her—that eye and brow lighted up with keen enthusiasm, and that sweet smile passing and appearing like gleams of sunshine on an April day. No wonder he should hunger and thirst to hear her sing. I now forgave him, from my heart, his reckless slight of me, and I felt ashamed at my pettish resentment of such a trifle—ashamed too of those bitter envious pangs that gnawed my inmost heart, in spite of all this admiration and delight.

"There now!" said she, playfully running her fingers over the keys, when she had concluded the second song. "What shall I give you next?"

But in saying this, she looked back at Lord Lowborough, who was standing a little behind, leaning

against the back of a chair, an attentive listener too, experiencing, to judge by his countenance, much the same feelings of mingled pleasure and sadness as I did. But the look she gave him plainly said, "Do you choose for me now: I have done enough for him, and will gladly exert myself to gratify you;" and thus encouraged, his lordship came forward, and turning over the music, presently set before her a little song that I had noticed before, and read more than once, with an interest arising from the circumstance of my connecting it in my mind with the reigning tyrant of my thoughts. And now with my nerves already excited and half unstrung, I could not hear those words so sweetly warbled forth, without some symptoms of emotion I was not able to suppress. Tears rose unbidden to my eyes, and I buried my face in the sofa-pillow that they might flow unseen while I listened. The air was simple, sweet, and sad, it is still running in my head,—and so are the words—

"Farewell to thee! but not farewell
To all my fondest thoughts of thee:
Within my heart they still shall dwell;
And they shall cheer and comfort me.

Oh, beautiful, and full of grace!
If thou hadst never met mine eye,
I had not dreamed a living face
Could fancied charms so far outvie.

If I may ne'er behold again
That form and face so dear to me,
Nor hear thy voice, still would I fain
Preserve, for aye, their memory.

That voice the magic of whose tone
Can wake an echo in my breast,
Creating feelings that, alone,
Can make my tranced spirit blest.

That laughing eye, whose sunny beam
My memory would not cherish less:—
And oh, that smile! whose joyous gleam
No mortal language can express.

Adieu! but let me cherish, still,
The hope with which I cannot part.
Contempt may wound, and coldness chill,
But still it lingers in my heart.

And who can tell but Heaven, at last,
May answer all my thousand prayers,
And bid the future pay the past
With joy for anguish, smiles for tears!"

When it ceased, I longed for nothing so much as to be out of the room. The sofa was not far from the door, but I did not dare to raise my head, for I knew Mr Huntingdon was standing near me, and I knew by the sound of his voice, as he spoke in answer to some remark of Lord Lowborough's, that his face was turned towards me. Perhaps a half-suppressed sob had caught his ear, and caused him to look round—Heaven forbid! But, with a violent effort, I checked all further signs of weakness, dried my tears, and, when I thought he had turned away again, rose, and instantly left the apartment, taking refuge in my favourite resort, the library.

There was no light there but the faint red glow of the neglected fire;—but I did not want a light; I only wanted to indulge my thoughts, unnoticed and undisturbed; and sitting down on a low stool before the easy-chair, I sunk my head upon its cushioned seat, and thought, and thought, until the tears gushed out again, and I wept like any child. Presently, however, the door was gently opened and some one entered the room. I trusted it was only a servant, and did not stir. The door was closed again—but I was not

alone; a hand gently touched my shoulder, and a voice said softly—

"Helen, what is the matter?"

I could not answer at the moment.

"You must, and shall tell me," was added, more vehemently, and the speaker threw himself on his knees beside me on the rug, and forcibly possessed himself of my hand; but I hastily caught it away, and replied—

"It is nothing to you, Mr Huntingdon."

"Are you sure it is nothing to me?" he returned; "can you swear that you were not thinking of me while you wept?"

This was unendurable. I made an effort to rise, but he was kneeling on my dress.

"Tell me," continued he—"I want to know,—because, if you were, I have something to say to you,—and if not, I'll go."

"Go then!" I cried; but, fearing he would obey too well, and never come again, I hastily added—"Or say what you have to say, and have done with it!"

"But which?" said he—"for I shall only say it if you really were thinking of me. So tell me, Helen."

"You're excessively impertinent, Mr Huntingdon!"

"Not at all—too pertinent, you mean—so you won't tell me?—Well, I'll spare your woman's pride, and construing your silence into 'Yes,' I'll take it for granted that I was the subject of your thoughts, and the cause of your affliction"——

"Indeed, sir"——

"If you deny it, I won't tell you my secret," threatened he; and I did not interrupt him again—or even attempt to repulse him, though he had taken my hand once more, and half embraced me with his other arm—I was scarcely conscious of it at the time.

"It is this," resumed he; "that Annabella Wilmot, in comparison with you, is like a flaunting peony compared with a sweet, wild rosebud gemmed with dew—and I love you to distraction!—Now, tell me if that intelligence gives you any pleasure. Silence again? That means yes—Then let me add, that I cannot live without you, and if you answer, No, to this last question, you will drive me mad.—Will you bestow yourself upon me?—you will!" he cried, nearly squeezing me to death in his arms.

"No, no!" I exclaimed, struggling to free myself from him—"you must ask my uncle and aunt."

"They won't refuse me, if you don't."

"I'm not so sure of that—my aunt dislikes you."

"But you don't, Helen—say you love me, and I'll go."

"I wish you would go!" I replied.

"I will, this instant,—if you'll only say you love me."

"You know I do," I answered. And again he caught me in his arms, and smothered me with kisses.

At that moment, my aunt opened wide the door, and stood before us, candle in hand, in shocked and horrified amazement, gazing alternately at Mr Huntingdon and me,—for we had both started up, and now stood wide enough asunder. But his confusion was only for a moment. Rallying in an instant, with the most enviable assurance, he began—

"I beg ten thousand pardons, Mrs Maxwell! Don't be too severe upon me. I've been asking your sweet niece to take me for better, for worse; and she, like a good girl, informs me she cannot think of it without her uncle's and aunt's consent. So let me implore you not to condemn me to eternal wretchedness: if you favour my cause, I am safe; for Mr Maxwell, I am certain, can refuse you nothing."

"We will talk of this to-morrow, sir," said my aunt coldly. "It is a subject that demands mature and serious deliberation. At present, you had better return to the drawing-room."

"But meantime," pleaded he, "let me commend my cause to your most indulgent"——

"No indulgence for you, Mr Huntingdon, must come between me and the consideration of my niece's happiness."

"Ah, true! I know she is an angel, and I am a presumptuous dog to dream of possessing such a treasure; but, nevertheless, I would sooner die than relinquish her in favour of the best man that ever went to heaven—and as for her happiness, I would sacrifice my body and soul"——

"Body and soul, Mr Huntingdon—sacrifice your soul?"

"Well, I would lay down life"——

"You would not be required to lay it down."

"I would spend it, then—devote my life—and all its powers, to the promotion and preservation"——

"Another time, sir, we will talk of this—and I should have felt disposed to judge more favourably of your pretensions, if you too had chosen another time and place, and let me add—another manner for your declaration."

"Why, you see, Mrs Maxwell,"—he began.

"Pardon me, sir," said she, with dignity—"the company are inquiring for you in the other room." And she turned to me.

"Then you must plead for me, Helen," said he, and at length withdrew.

"You had better retire to your room, Helen," said my aunt gravely. "I will discuss this matter with you, too, to-morrow."

"Don't be angry, aunt," said I.

"My dear, I am not angry," she replied: "I am surprised. If it is true that you told him you could not accept his offer without our consent"——

"It is true," interrupted I.

"Then how could you permit"——

"I couldn't help it, aunt," I cried, bursting into tears. They were not altogether the tears of sorrow, or of fear for her displeasure, but rather the outbreak of the general tumultuous excitement of my feelings. But my good aunt was touched at my agitation. In a softer tone, she repeated her recommendation to retire, and, gently kissing my forehead, bade me good-night, and put her candle in my hand; and I went; but my brain worked so, I could not think of sleeping. I feel calmer now that I have written all this; and I will go to bed, and try to win tired nature's sweet restorer.

——o——

Chapter xx.

September 24th.

IN the morning I rose, light and cheerful, nay, intensely happy. The hovering cloud cast over me by my aunt's views, and by the fear of not obtaining her consent, was lost in the bright effulgence of my own hopes, and the too delightful consciousness of requited love. It was a splendid morning; and I went out to enjoy it, in a quiet ramble in company with my own blissful thoughts. The dew was on the grass, and ten thousand gossamers were waving in the breeze; the happy red-breast was pouring out its little soul in song, and my heart overflowed with silent hymns of gratitude and praise to Heaven.

But I had not wandered far before my solitude was interrupted by the only person that could have disturbed

my musings, at that moment, without being looked upon as an unwelcome intruder: Mr Huntingdon came suddenly upon me. So unexpected was the apparition, that I might have thought it the creation of an over-excited imagination, had the sense of sight alone borne witness to his presence; but immediately I felt his strong arm round my waist and his warm kiss on my cheek, while his keen and gleeful salutation, "My own Helen!" was ringing in my ear.

"Not yours yet," said I, hastily swerving aside from this too presumptuous greeting—"remember my guardians. You will not easily obtain my aunt's consent. Don't you see she is prejudiced against you?"

"I do, dearest; and you must tell me why, that I may best know how to combat her objections. I suppose she thinks I am a prodigal," pursued he, observing that I was unwilling to reply, "and concludes that I shall have but little worldly goods wherewith to endow my better half? If so, you must tell her that my property is mostly entailed, and I cannot get rid of it. There may be a few mortgages on the rest—a few trifling debts and incumbrances here and there, but nothing to speak of; and though I acknowledge I am not so rich as I might be—or have been—still, I think, we could manage pretty comfortably on what's left. My father, you know, was something of a miser, and, in his latter days especially, saw no pleasure in life but to amass riches; and so it is no wonder that his son should make it his chief delight to spend them, which was accordingly the case, until my acquaintance with you, dear Helen, taught me other views and nobler aims. And the very idea of having you to care for under my roof, would force me to moderate my expenses and live like a Christian—not to speak of all the prudence and virtue you would instil into my mind by your wise counsels and sweet, attractive goodness."

"But it is not that," said I, "it is not money my aunt thinks about. She knows better than to value worldly wealth above its price."

"What is it then?"

"She wishes me to—to marry none but a really good man."

"What, a man of 'decided piety'?—ahem!—Well, come, I'll manage that too! It's Sunday to-day, isn't it? I'll go to church morning, afternoon, and evening, and comport myself in such a godly sort that she shall regard me with admiration and sisterly love, as a brand plucked from the burning. I'll come home sighing like a furnace, and full of the savour and unction of dear Mr Blatant's discourse"——

"Mr Leighton," said I dryly.

"Is Mr Leighton a 'sweet preacher,' Helen—a 'dear, delightful, heavenly-minded man'?"

"He is a good man, Mr Huntingdon. I wish I could say half as much for you."

"Oh, I forgot, you are a saint, too. I crave your pardon, dearest—but don't call me Mr Huntingdon, my name is Arthur."

"I'll call you nothing—for I'll have nothing at all to do with you if you talk in that way any more. If you really mean to deceive my aunt as you say, you are very wicked; and if not, you are very wrong to jest on such a subject."

"I stand corrected," said he, concluding his laugh with a sorrowful sigh. "Now," resumed he, after a momentary pause, "let us talk about something else. And come nearer to me, Helen, and take my arm; and then I'll let you alone. I can't be quiet while I see you walking there."

I complied; but said we must soon return to the house.

"No one will be down to breakfast yet, for long

enough," he answered. "You spoke of your guardians, just now, Helen, but is not your father still living?"

"Yes, but I always look upon my uncle and aunt as my guardians, for they are so, in deed, though not in name. My father has entirely given me up to their care. I have never seen him since dear mamma died when I was a very little girl, and my aunt, at her request, offered to take charge of me, and took me away to Staningley, where I have remained ever since; and I don't think he would object to anything for me, that she thought proper to sanction."

"But would he sanction anything to which she thought proper to object?"

"No, I don't think he cares enough about me."

"He is very much to blame—but he doesn't know what an angel he has for his daughter—which is all the better for me, as, if he did, he would not be willing to part with such a treasure."

"And Mr Huntingdon," said I, "I suppose you know I am not an heiress?"

He protested he had never given it a thought, and begged I would not disturb his present enjoyment by the mention of such uninteresting subjects. I was glad of this proof of disinterested affection; for Annabella Wilmot is the probable heiress to all her uncle's wealth, in addition to her late father's property, which she has already in possession.

I now insisted upon retracing our steps to the house; but we walked slowly, and went on talking as we proceeded. I need not repeat all we said: let me rather refer to what passed between my aunt and me, after breakfast, when Mr Huntingdon called my uncle aside, no doubt to make his proposals, and she beckoned me into another room, where she once more commenced a solemn remonstrance, which, however, entirely failed to

convince me that her view of the case was preferable to my own.

"You judge him uncharitably, aunt, I know," said I. "His very friends are not half so bad as you represent them. There is Walter Hargrave, Milicent's brother, for one; he is but a little lower than the angels, if half she says of him is true. She is continually talking to me about him, and lauding his many virtues to the skies."

"You will form a very inadequate estimate of a man's character," replied she, "if you judge by what a fond sister says of him. The worst of them generally know how to hide their misdeeds from their sisters' eyes, and their mothers' too."

"And there is Lord Lowborough," continued I, "quite a decent man."

"Who told you so? Lord Lowborough is a desperate man. He has dissipated his fortune in gambling and other things, and is now seeking an heiress to retrieve it. I told Miss Wilmot so; but you're all alike: she haughtily answered she was very much obliged to me, but she believed she knew when a man was seeking her for her fortune, and when for herself; she flattered herself she had had experience enough in those matters, to be justified in trusting to her own judgment—and as for his lordship's lack of fortune, she cared nothing about that, as she hoped her own would suffice for both; and as for his wildness, she supposed he was no worse than others—besides, he was reformed now. Yes, they can all play the hypocrite when they want to take in a fond, misguided woman!"

"Well, I think he's about as good as she is," said I. "But when Mr Huntingdon is married, he won't have many opportunities of consorting with his bachelor friends;—and the worse they are, the more I long to deliver him from them."

"To be sure, my dear; and the worse he is, I suppose, the more you long to deliver him from himself."

"Yes, provided he is not incorrigible—that is, the more I long to deliver him from his faults—to give him an opportunity of shaking off the adventitious evil got from contact with others worse than himself, and shining out in the unclouded light of his own genuine goodness—to do my utmost to help his better self against his worse, and make him what he would have been if he had not, from the beginning, had a bad, selfish, miserly father, who, to gratify his own sordid passions, restricted him in the most innocent enjoyments of childhood and youth, and so disgusted him with every kind of restraint;—and a foolish mother who indulged him to the top of his bent, deceiving her husband for him, and doing her utmost to encourage those germs of folly and vice it was her duty to suppress,—and then, such a set of companions as you represent his friends to be"——

"Poor man!" said she sarcastically, "his kind have greatly wronged him!"

"They have," cried I—"and they shall wrong him no more—his wife shall undo what his mother did!"

"Well," said she, after a short pause, "I must say, Helen, I thought better of your judgment than this—and your taste too. How you can love such a man I cannot tell, or what pleasure you can find in his company; for 'What fellowship hath light with darkness; or he that believeth with an infidel?'"

"He is not an infidel;—and I am not light, and he is not darkness; his worst and only vice is thoughtlessness."

"And thoughtlessness," pursued my aunt, "may lead to every crime, and will but poorly excuse our errors in the sight of God. Mr Huntingdon, I suppose, is not without the common faculties of men: he is not so light-headed as to be irresponsible: his Maker

has endowed him with reason and conscience as well as the rest of us; the Scriptures are open to him as well as to others;—and 'If he hear not them, neither will he hear though one rose from the dead.' And, remember, Helen," continued she solemnly, "'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and they that forget God!' And suppose, even, that he should continue to love you, and you him, and that you should pass through life together with tolerable comfort,—how will it be in the end, when you see yourselves parted for ever; you, perhaps, taken into eternal bliss, and he cast into the lake that burneth with unquenchable fire—there for ever to"——

"Not for ever," I exclaimed, "'only till he has paid the uttermost farthing;' for 'if any man's work abide not the fire, he shall suffer loss, yet himself shall be saved, but so as by fire;' and He that 'is able to subdue all things to Himself will have all men to be saved,' and 'will in the fulness of time, gather together in one all things in Christ Jesus, who tasted death for every man, and in whom God will reconcile all things to Himself, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven.'"

"Oh, Helen! where did you learn all this?"

"In the Bible, aunt. I have searched it through, and found nearly thirty passages, all tending to support the same theory."

"And is that the use you make of your Bible? And did you find no passages tending to prove the danger and falsity of such a belief?"

"No: I found, indeed, some passages that, taken by themselves, might seem to contradict that opinion; but they will all bear a different construction to that which is commonly given, and in most the only difficulty is in the word which we translate 'everlasting' or 'eternal.' I don't know the Greek, but I believe it strictly means for ages, and might signify either endless or long-

enduring. And as for the danger of the belief, I would not publish it abroad, if I thought any poor wretch would be likely to presume upon it to his own destruction, but it is a glorious thought to cherish in one's own heart, and I would not part with it for all the world can give!"

Here our conference ended, for it was now high time to prepare for church. Every one attended the morning service, except my uncle, who hardly ever goes, and Mr Wilmot, who stayed at home with him to enjoy a quiet game of cribbage. In the afternoon Miss Wilmot and Lord Lowborough likewise excused themselves from attending; but Mr Huntingdon vouchsafed to accompany us again. Whether it was to ingratiate himself with my aunt I cannot tell, but, if so, he certainly should have behaved better. I must confess, I did not like his conduct during service at all. Holding his Prayer-book upside down, or open at any place but the right, he did nothing but stare about him, unless he happened to catch my aunt's eye or mine, and then he would drop his own on his book, with a puritanical air of mock solemnity that would have been ludicrous, if it had not been too provoking. Once, during the sermon, after attentively regarding Mr Leighton for a few minutes, he suddenly produced his gold pencil-case and snatched up a Bible. Perceiving that I observed the movement, he whispered that he was going to make a note of the sermon; but instead of that—as I sat next him I could not help seeing that he was making a caricature of the preacher, giving to the respectable, pious, elderly gentleman, the air and aspect of a most absurd old hypocrite. And yet, upon his return, he talked to my aunt about the sermon with a degree of modest, serious discrimination that tempted me to believe he had really attended and profited by the discourse.

Just before dinner my uncle called me into the library for the discussion of a very important matter, which was dismissed in few words.

"Now, Nell," said he, "this young Huntingdon has been asking for you: what must I say about it? Your aunt would answer 'No'—but what say you?"

"I say yes, uncle," replied I, without a moment's hesitation; for I had thoroughly made up my mind on the subject.

"Very good!" cried he. "Now that's a good honest answer—wonderful for a girl!—Well, I'll write to your father to-morrow. He's sure to give his consent; so you may look on the matter as settled. You'd have done a deal better if you'd taken Wilmot, I can tell you; but that you won't believe. At your time of life, it's love that rules the roast: at mine, it's solid, serviceable gold. I suppose now, you'd never dream of looking into the state of your husband's finances, or troubling your head about settlements, or anything of that sort?"

"I don't think I should."

"Well, be thankful, then, that you've wiser heads to think for you. I haven't had time, yet, to examine thoroughly into this young rascal's affairs, but I see that a great part of his father's fine property has been squandered away;—but still, I think there's a pretty fair share of it left, and a little careful nursing may make a handsome thing of it yet; and then we must persuade your father to give you a decent fortune, as he has only one besides yourself to care for;—and, if you behave well, who knows but what I may be induced to remember you in my will?" contined he, putting his fingers to his nose, with a knowing wink.

"Thanks, uncle, for that and all your kindness," replied I.

"Well, and I questioned this young spark on the

matter of settlements," continued he; "and he seemed disposed to be generous enough on that point"——

"I knew he would!" said I. "But pray don't trouble your head—or his, or mine about that; for all I have will be his, and all he has will be mine; and what more could either of us require?" And I was about to make my exit, but he called me back.

"Stop, stop!" cried he—"We haven't mentioned the time yet. When must it be? Your aunt would put it off till the Lord knows when, but he is anxious to be bound as soon as may be: he won't hear of waiting beyond next month; and you, I guess, will be of the same mind, so"——

"Not at all, uncle; on the contrary, I should like to wait till after Christmas, at least."

"Oh! pooh, pooh! never tell me that tale—I know better," cried he; and he persisted in his incredulity. Nevertheless, it is quite true. I am in no hurry at all. How can I be, when I think of the momentous change that awaits me, and of all I have to leave? It is happiness enough, to know that we are to be united; and that he really loves me, and I may love him as devotedly, and think of him as often as I please. However, I insisted upon consulting my aunt about the time of the wedding, for I determined her counsels should not be utterly disregarded; and no conclusions on that particular are come to yet.

——o——

Chapter xxj.

October 1st.

ALL is settled now. My father has given his consent, and the time is fixed for Christmas, by a sort of compromise between the respective advocates for hurry and delay. Milicent Hargrave is

to be one bridesmaid, and Annabella Wilmot the other —not that I am particularly fond of the latter, but she is an intimate of the family, and I have not another friend.

When I told Milicent of my engagement, she rather provoked me by her manner of taking it. After staring a moment in mute surprise, she said—

"Well, Helen, I suppose I ought to congratulate you—and I am glad to see you so happy; but I did not think you would take him; and I can't help feeling surprised that you should like him so much."

"Why so?"

"Because you are so superior to him in every way, and there's something so bold—and reckless about him —so, I don't know how—but I always feel a wish to get out of his way, when I see him approach."

"You are timid, Milicent, but that's no fault of his."

"And then his look," continued she. "People say he's handsome, and of course he is, but I don't like that kind of beauty; and I wonder that you should."

"Why so?"

"Well, you know, I think there's nothing noble or lofty in his appearance."

"In fact you wonder that I can like any one so unlike the stilted heroes of romance! Well! give me my flesh and blood lover, and I'll leave all the Sir Herberts and Valentines to you—if you can find them."

"I don't want them," said she. "I'll be satisfied with flesh and blood too—only the spirit must shine through and predominate. But don't you think Mr Huntingdon's face is too red?"

"No!" cried I indignantly. "It is not red at all. There is just a pleasant glow—a healthy freshness in

his complexion, the warm, pinky tint of the whole harmonising with the deeper colour of the cheeks, exactly as it ought to do. I hate a man to be red and white, like a painted doll—or all sickly white, or smoky black, or cadaverous yellow!"

"Well, tastes differ—but I like pale or dark," replied she. "But to tell you the truth, Helen, I had been deluding myself with the hope that you would one day be my sister. I expected Walter would be introduced to you next season; and I thought you would like him, and was certain he would like you; and I flattered myself I should thus have the felicity of seeing the two persons I liked best in the world—except mamma—united in one. He mayn't be exactly what you would call handsome, but he's far more distinguished-looking, and nicer and better than Mr Huntingdon;—and I'm sure you would say so, if you knew him."

"Impossible, Milicent! You think so, because you're his sister; and, on that account, I'll forgive you; but nobody else should so disparage Arthur Huntingdon to me, with impunity."

Miss Wilmot expressed her feelings on the subject, almost as openly.

"And so, Helen," said she, coming up to me with a smile of no amiable import, "you are to be Mrs Huntingdon, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied I. "Don't you envy me?"

"Oh, dear, no!" she exclaimed. "I shall probably be Lady Lowborough some day, and then you know, dear, I shall be in a capacity to inquire, 'Don't you envy me?'"

"Henceforth, I shall envy no one," returned I.

"Indeed! Are you so happy then?" said she thoughtfully; and something very like a cloud of disappointment shadowed her face. "And does he love you—I mean, does he idolise you as much as you do

him?" she added, fixing her eyes upon me with ill-disguised anxiety for the reply.

"I don't want to be idolised," I answered, "but I am well assured that he loves me more than anybody else in the world—as I do him."

"Exactly," said she, with a nod. "I wish"—— she paused.

"What do you wish?" asked I, annoyed at the vindictive expression of her countenance.

"I wish," returned she, with a short laugh, "that all the attractive points and desirable qualifications of the two gentlemen were united in one—that Lord Lowborough had Huntingdon's handsome face and good temper, and all his wit, and mirth and charm, or else that Huntingdon had Lowborough's pedigree, and title, and delightful old family seat, and I had him; and you might have the other and welcome."

"Thank you, dear Annabella, I am better satisfied with things as they are, for my own part; and for you, I wish you were as well content with your intended as I am with mine," said I; and it was true enough; for, though vexed at first at her unamiable spirit, her frankness touched me, and the contrast between our situations was such, that I could well afford to pity her and wish her well.

Mr Huntingdon's acquaintances appear to be no better pleased with our approaching union than mine. This morning's post brought him letters from several of his friends, during the perusal of which, at the breakfast-table, he excited the attention of the company, by the singular variety of his grimaces. But he crushed them all into his pocket, with a private laugh, and said nothing till the meal was concluded. Then, while the company were hanging over the fire or loitering through the room, previous to settling to their various morning's avocations, he came and leant over the back of my chair,

with his face in contact with my curls, and commencing with a quiet little kiss, poured forth the following complaints into my ear—

"Helen, you witch, do you know that you've entailed upon me the curses of all my friends? I wrote to them the other day, to tell them of my happy prospects, and now, instead of a bundle of congratulations, I've got a pocketful of bitter execrations and reproaches. There's not one kind wish for me, or one good word for you, among them all. They say there'll be no more fun now, no more merry days and glorious nights—and all my fault—I am the first to break up the jovial band, and others, in pure despair, will follow my example. I was the very life and prop of the community, they do me the honour to say, and I have shamefully betrayed my trust"——

"You may join them again, if you like," said I, somewhat piqued at the sorrowful tone of his discourse. "I should be sorry to stand between any man—or body of men, and so much happiness; and perhaps I can manage to do without you, as well as your poor deserted friends."

"Bless you; no," murmured he. "It's 'all for love or the world well lost,' with me. Let them go to—where they belong, to speak politely. But if you saw how they abuse me, Helen, you would love me all the more, for having ventured so much for your sake."

He pulled out his crumpled letters. I thought he was going to show them to me, and told him I did not wish to see them.

"I'm not going to show them to you, love," said he. "They're hardly fit for a lady's eyes—the most part of them. But look here. This is Grimsby's scrawl—only three lines, the sulky dog! He doesn't say much, to be sure, but his very silence implies more than all the

others' words, and the less he says, the more he thinks —and this is Hargrave's missive. He is particularly grieved at me, because, forsooth, he had fallen in love with you from his sister's reports, and meant to have married you himself, as soon as he had sown his wild oats."

"I'm vastly obliged to him," observed I.

"And so am I," said he. "And look at this. This is Hattersley's—every page stuffed full of railing accusations, bitter curses, and lamentable complaints, ending up with swearing that he'll get married himself in revenge; he'll throw himself away on the first old maid that chooses to set her cap at him,—as if I cared what he did with himself."

"Well," said I, "if you do give up your intimacy with these men, I don't think you will have much cause to regret the loss of their society; for it's my belief they never did you much good."

"Maybe not; but we'd a merry time of it, too, though mingled with sorrow and pain, as Lowborough knows to his cost—Ha! ha!" and while he was laughing at the recollection of Lowborough's troubles, my uncle came and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Come, my lad!" said he. "Are you too busy making love to my niece, to make war with the pheasants?—First of October remember!—Sun shines out—rain ceased—even Boarham's not afraid to venture in his waterproof boots; and Wilmot and I are going to beat you all. I declare, we old 'uns are the keenest sportsmen of the lot!"

"I'll show you what I can do to-day, however," said my companion. "I'll murder your birds by wholesale, just for keeping me away from better company than either you or them."

And so saying he departed; and I saw no more of him till dinner. It seemed a weary time; I wonder what I shall do without him.

It is very true that the three elder gentlemen have proved themselves much keener sportsmen than the two younger ones; for both Lord Lowborough and Arthur Huntingdon have of late almost daily neglected the shooting excursions, to accompany us in our various rides and rambles. But these merry times are fast drawing to a close. In less than a fortnight the party break up, much to my sorrow, for every day I enjoy it more and more—now that Messrs Boarham and Wilmot have ceased to tease me, and my aunt has ceased to lecture me, and I have ceased to be jealous of Annabella—and even to dislike her—and now that Mr Huntingdon is become my Arthur, and I may enjoy his society without restraint—What shall I do without him, I repeat?

—o—

Chapter xxij.

October 5th.

MY cup of sweets is not unmingled: it is dashed with a bitterness that I cannot hide from myself, disguise it as I will. I may try to persuade myself that the sweetness overpowers it; I may call it a pleasant aromatic flavour; but say what I will, it is still there, and I cannot but taste it. I cannot shut my eyes to Arthur's faults; and the more I love him the more they trouble me. His very heart, that I trusted so, is, I fear, less warm and generous than I thought it. At least, he gave me a specimen of his character to-day, that seemed to merit a harder name than thoughtlessness. He and Lord Lowborough were accompanying Annabella and me in a long, delightful ride; he was riding by my side, as usual, and Annabella and Lord Lowborough were a little before us, the

latter bending towards his companion as if in tender and confidential discourse.

"Those two will get the start of us, Helen, if we don't look sharp," observed Huntingdon. "They'll make a match of it, as sure as can be. That Lowborough's fairly besotted. But he'll find himself in a fix when he's got her, I doubt."

"And she'll find herself in a fix when she's got him," said I, "if what I have heard of him is true."

"Not a bit of it. She knows what she's about; but he, poor fool, deludes himself with the notion that she'll make him a good wife, and because she has amused him with some rodomontade about despising rank and wealth in matters of love and marriage, he flatters himself that she's devotedly attached to him; that she will not refuse him for his poverty, and does not court him for his rank, but loves him for himself alone."

"But is not he courting her for her fortune?"

"No, not he. That was the first attraction, certainly; but now he has quite lost sight of it: it never enters his calculations, except merely as an essential without which, for the lady's own sake, he could not think of marrying her. No; he's fairly in love. He thought he never could be again, but he's in for it once more. He was to have been married before, some two or three years ago; but he lost his bride by losing his fortune. He got into a bad way among us in London: he had an unfortunate taste for gambling; and surely the fellow was born under an unlucky star, for he always lost thrice where he gained once. That's a mode of self-torment I never was much addicted to. When I spend my money I like to enjoy the full value of it: I see no fun in wasting it on thieves and blacklegs; and as for gaining money, hitherto I have always had sufficient; it's time enough to be clutching for

more, I think, when you begin to see the end of what you have. But I have sometimes frequented the gaming-houses just to watch the on-goings of those mad votaries of chance—a very interesting study, I assure you, Helen, and sometimes very diverting: I've had many a laugh at the boobies and bedlamites. Lowborough was quite infatuated—not willingly, but of necessity,—he was always resolving to give it up, and always breaking his resolutions. Every venture was the 'just once more:' if he gained a little, he hoped to gain a little more next time, and if he lost, it would not do to leave off at that juncture; he must go on till he had retrieved that last misfortune, at least: bad luck could not last for ever; and every lucky hit was looked upon as the dawn of better times, till experience proved the contrary. At length he grew desperate, and we were daily on the look-out for a case of felo-de-se—no great matter, some of us whispered, as his existence had ceased to be an acquisition to our club. At last, however, he came to a check. He made a large stake which he determined should be the last, whether he lost or won. He had often so determined before, to be sure, and as often broken his determination; and so it was this time. He lost; and while his antagonist smilingly swept away the stakes, he turned chalky white, drew back in silence, and wiped his forehead. I was present at the time; and while he stood with folded arms and eyes fixed on the ground, I knew well enough what was passing in his mind.

"'Is it to be the last, Lowborough?' said I, stepping up to him.

"'The last but one,' he answered, with a grim smile; and then, rushing back to the table, he struck his hand upon it, and, raising his voice high above all the confusion of jingling coins and muttered oaths and curses in

the room, he swore a deep and solemn oath, that, come what would, this trial should be the last, and imprecated unspeakable curses on his head, if ever he should shuffle a card, or rattle a dice-box again. He then doubled his former stake, and challenged any one present to play against him. Grimbsy instantly presented himself. Lowborough glared fiercely at him, for Grimsby was almost as celebrated for his luck as he was for his ill-fortune. However, they fell to work. But Grimsby had much skill and little scruple, and whether he took advantage of the other's trembling, blinded eagerness to deal unfairly by him, I cannot undertake to say; but Lowborough lost again, and fell dead sick.

"'You'd better try once more,' said Grimsby, leaning across the table. And then he winked at me.

"'I've nothing to try with,' said the poor devil, with a ghastly smile.

"'Oh, Huntingdon will lend you what you want,' said the other.

"'No; you heard my oath,' answered Lowborough, turning away in quiet despair. And I took him by the arm, and led him out.

"'Is it to be the last, Lowborough?' I asked, when I got him into the street.

"'The last,' he answered, somewhat against my expectation. And I took him home—that is, to our club—for he was as submissive as a child, and plied him with brandy-and-water till he began to look rather brighter—rather more alive, at least.

"'Huntingdon, I'm ruined!' said he, taking the third glass from my hand—he had drunk the others in dead silence.

"'Not you!' said I. 'You'll find a man can live without his money as merrily as a tortoise without its head, or a wasp without its body.'

"'But I'm in debt,' said he—'deep in debt! And I can never, never get out of it!'

"'Well, what of that? many a better man than you has lived and died in debt, and they can't put you in prison, you know, because you're a peer.' And I handed him his fourth tumbler.

"'But I hate to be in debt!' he shouted. 'I wasn't born for it, and I cannot bear it!'

"'What can't be cured must be endured,' said I, beginning to mix the fifth.

"'And then, I've lost my Caroline.' And he began to snivel then, for the brandy had softened his heart.

"'No matter,' I answered, 'there are more Carolines in the world than one.'

"'There's only one for me,' he replied, with a dolorous sigh. 'And if there were fifty more, who's to get them, I wonder, without money?'

"'Oh, somebody will take you for your title; and then you've your family estate yet; that's entailed, you know.'

"'I wish to God I could sell it to pay my debts,' he muttered.

"'And then,' said Grimsby, who had just come in, 'you can try again, you know. I would have more than one chance, if I were you. I'd never stop here.'

"'I won't, I tell you!' shouted he. And he started up, and left the room—walking rather unsteadily, for the liquor had got into his head. He was not so much used to it then, but after that, he took to it kindly to solace his cares.

"He kept his oath about gambling (not a little to the surprise of us all), though Grimsby did his utmost to tempt him to break it; but now he had got hold of another habit that bothered him nearly as much, for he soon discovered that the demon of drink was as black as the demon of play, and nearly as hard to get rid of

—especially as his kind friends did all they could to second the promptings of his own insatiable cravings."

"Then, they were demons themselves," cried I, unable to contain my indignation. "And you, Mr Huntingdon, it seems, were the first to tempt him."

"Well, what could we do?" replied he deprecatingly.—"We meant it in kindness—we couldn't bear to see the poor fellow so miserable:—and besides, he was such a damper upon us, sitting there, silent and glum, when he was under the threefold influence of the loss of his sweetheart, the loss of his fortune, and the reaction of the last night's debauch; whereas, when he had something in him, if he was not merry himself, he was an unfailing source of merriment to us. Even Grimsby could chuckle over his odd sayings: they delighted him far more than my merry jests, or Hattersley's riotous mirth. But, one evening, when we were sitting over our wine, after one of our club dinners, and all had been hearty together,—Lowborough giving us mad toasts, and hearing our wild songs, and bearing a hand in the applause, if he did not help us to sing them himself, — he suddenly relapsed into silence, sinking his head on his hand, and never lifting his glass to his lips;—but this was nothing new; so we let him alone, and went on with our jollification, till, suddenly raising his head, he interrupted us in the middle of a roar of laughter, by exclaiming—

"'Gentlemen, where is all this to end?—Will you just tell me that now?—Where is it all to end?' He rose.

"'A speech, a speech!' shouted we. 'Hear, hear! Lowborough's going to give us a speech!'

"He waited calmly till the thunders of applause and jingling of glasses had ceased, and then proceeded—

"'It's only this, gentlemen,—that I think we'd

better go no further. We'd better stop while we can.'

"'Just so,' cried Hattersley—

> "Stop, poor sinner, stop and think
> Before you further go,
> No longer sport upon the brink
> Of everlasting woe."

"'Exactly!' replied his lordship, with the utmost gravity. 'And if you choose to visit the bottomless pit, I won't go with you—we must part company, for I swear I'll not move another step towards it!—What's this?' he said, taking up his glass of wine.

"'Taste it,' suggested I.

"'This is hell broth!' he exclaimed. 'I renounce it for ever!' And he threw it out into the middle of the table.

"'Fill again!' said I, handing him the bottle—and let us drink to your renunciation.'

"'It's rank poison,' said he, grasping the bottle by the neck, 'and I forswear it! I've given up gambling, and I'll give up this too.' He was on the point of deliberately pouring the whole contents of the bottle on to the table, but Hargrave wrested it from him. 'On you be the curse then!' said he. And, backing from the room, he shouted, 'Farewell, ye tempters!' and vanished amid shouts of laughter and applause.

"We expected him back among us the next day; but, to our surprise, the place remained vacant; we saw nothing of him for a whole week; and we really began to think he was going to keep his word. At last, one evening, when we were most of us assembled together again, he entered, silent and grim as a ghost, and would have quietly slipped into his usual seat at my elbow, but we all rose to welcome him, and several voices were raised to ask what he would have, and several hands

were busy with bottle and glass to serve him; but I knew a smoking tumbler of brandy-and-water would comfort him best, and had nearly prepared it, when he peevishly pushed it away, saying—

"'Do let me alone, Huntingdon! Do be quiet, all of you! I'm not come to join you: I'm only come to be with you awhile, because I can't bear my own thoughts.' And he folded his arms, and leant back in his chair; so we let him be. But I left the glass by him; and, after a while, Grimsby directed my attention towards it, by a significant wink; and, on turning my head, I saw it was drained to the bottom. He made me a sign to replenish, and quietly pushed up the bottle. I willingly complied: but Lowborough detected the pantomime, and, nettled at the intelligent grins that were passing between us, snatched the glass from my hand, dashed the contents of it in Grimsby's face, threw the empty tumbler at me, and then bolted from the room."

"I hope he broke your head," said I.

"No, love," replied he, laughing immoderately at the recollection of the whole affair, "he would have done so,—and, perhaps, spoilt my face, too, but, providentially, this forest of curls" (taking off his hat, and showing his luxuriant chestnut locks) "saved my skull, and prevented the glass from breaking, till it reached the table."

"After that," he continued, "Lowborough kept aloof from us a week or two longer. I used to meet him occasionally in the town; and then, as I was too good-natured to resent his unmannerly conduct, and he bore no malice against me,—he was never unwilling to talk to me; on the contrary, he would cling to me, and follow me anywhere,—but to the club, and the gaming-houses, and such like dangerous places of resort—he was so weary of his own moping, melancholy mind.

Walter L. Colls Ph. Sc.

Farewell, ye tempters:

At last, I got him to come in with me to the club, on condition that I would not tempt him to drink; and, for some time, he continued to look in upon us pretty regularly of an evening,—still abstaining, with wonderful perseverance, from the 'rank poison' he had so bravely forsworn. But some of our members protested against this conduct. They did not like to have him sitting there like a skeleton at a feast, instead of contributing his quota to the general amusement, casting a cloud over all, and watching, with greedy eyes, every drop they carried to their lips—they vowed it was not fair; and some of them maintained, that he should either be compelled to do as others did, or expelled from the society; and swore that, next time he showed himself, they would tell him as much, and, if he did not take the warning, proceed to active measures. However, I befriended him on this occasion, and recommended them to let him be for a while, intimating that, with a little patience on our parts, he would soon come round again. But, to be sure, it was rather provoking; for, though he refused to drink like an honest Christian, it was well known to me that he kept a private bottle of laudanum about him, which he was continually soaking at—or rather, holding off and on with, abstaining one day, and exceeding the next—just like the spirits.

"One night, however, during one of our orgies—one of our high festivals, I mean—he glided in, like the ghost in Macbeth, and seated himself, as usual, a little back from the table, in the chair we always placed for 'the spectre,' whether it chose to fill it or not. I saw by his face that he was suffering from the effects of an overdose of his insidious comforter; but nobody spoke to him, and he spoke to nobody. A few sidelong glances, and a whispered observation, that 'the ghost was come,' was all the notice he drew by his appearance, and we went on with our merry carousals as

before, till he startled us all, by suddenly drawing in his chair, and leaning forward with his elbows on the table, and exclaiming with portentous solemnity—

"'Well! it puzzles me what you can find to be so merry about. What you see in life I don't know—I see only the blackness of darkness, and a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation!'

"All the company simultaneously pushed up their glasses to him, and I set them before him in a semi-circle, and, tenderly patting him on the back, bid him drink, and he would soon see as bright a prospect as any of us; but he pushed them back, muttering—

"'Take them away! I won't taste it, I tell you. I won't—I won't!' So I handed them down again to the owners; but I saw that he followed them with a glare of hungry regret as they departed. Then, he clasped his hands before his eyes to shut out the sight, and two minutes after, lifted his head again, and said, in a hoarse but vehement whisper—

"'And yet I must! Huntingdon, get me a glass!'

"'Take the bottle, man!' said I, thrusting the brandy-bottle into his hand—but stop, I'm telling too much," muttered the narrator, startled at the look I turned upon him. "But no matter," he recklessly added, and thus continued his relation. "In his desperate eagerness, he seized the bottle and sucked away, till he suddenly dropped from his chair, disappearing under the table amid a tempest of applause. The consequence of this imprudence was something like an apoplectic fit, followed by a rather severe brain fever"——

"And what did you think of yourself, sir?" said I quickly.

"Of course I was very penitent," he replied. "I went to see him once or twice—nay, twice or thrice—

or by'r lady, some four times—and when he got better, I tenderly brought him back to the fold."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I restored him to the bosom of the club, and compassionating the feebleness of his health and extreme lowness of his spirits, I recommended him to 'take a little wine for his stomach's sake,' and, when he was sufficiently re-established, to embrace the media-via, ni-jamais-ni-toujours plan—not to kill himself like a fool, and not to abstain like a ninny—in a word, to enjoy himself like a rational creature, and do as I did; for don't think, Helen, that I'm a tippler; I'm nothing at all of the kind, and never was, and never shall be. I value my comfort far too much. I see that a man cannot give himself up to drinking without being miserable one half his days and mad the other; besides, I like to enjoy my life at all sides and ends, which cannot be done by one that suffers himself to be the slave of a single propensity—and, moreover, drinking spoils one's good looks," he concluded, with a most conceited smile that ought to have provoked me more than it did.

"And did Lord Lowborough profit by your advice?" I asked.

"Why, yes, in a manner. For a while, he managed very well: indeed he was a model of moderation and prudence—something too much so for the tastes of our wild community; but, somehow, Lowborough had not the gift of moderation: if he stumbled a little to one side, he must go down before he could right himself: if he overshot the mark one night, the effects of it rendered him so miserable the next day that he must repeat the offence to mend it; and so on from day to day, till his clamorous conscience brought him to a stand. And then, in his sober moments, he so bothered his friends with his remorse and his terrors and woes,

that they were obliged, in self-defence, to get him to drown his sorrows in wine, or any more potent beverage that came to hand; and when his first scruples of conscience were overcome, he would need no more persuading, he would often grow desperate, and be as great a blackguard as any of them could desire—but only to lament his own unutterable wickedness and degradation the more when the fit was over.

"At last, one day, when he and I were alone together, after pondering awhile in one of his gloomy, abstracted moods, with his arms folded and his head sunk on his breast, he suddenly woke up, and vehemently grasping my arm, said—

"'Huntingdon, this won't do! I'm resolved to have done with it.'

"'What, are you going to shoot yourself?' said I.

"'No; I'm going to reform.'

"'Oh, that's nothing new! You've been going to reform these twelve months and more.'

"'Yes, but you wouldn't let me; and I was such a fool I couldn't live without you. But now I see what it is that keeps me back, and what's wanted to save me; and I'd compass sea and land to get it—only I'm afraid there's no chance.' And he sighed as if his heart would break.

"'What is it, Lowborough?' said I, thinking he was fairly cracked at last.

"'A wife,' he answered; 'for I can't live alone, because my own mind distracts me, and I can't live with you, because you take the devil's part against me.'

"'Who—I?'

"'Yes—all of you do—and you more than any of them, you know. But if I could get a wife, with fortune enough to pay off my debts and set me straight in the world'——

"'To be sure,' said I.

"'And sweetness and goodness enough,' he continued, 'to make home tolerable, and to reconcile me to myself, I think I should do, yet. I shall never be in love again, that's certain; but perhaps that would be no great matter, it would enable me to choose with my eyes open—and I should make a good husband in spite of it; but could any one be in love with me?—that's the question. With your good looks and powers of fascination' (he was pleased to say), 'I might hope; but as it is, Huntingdon, do you think anybody would take me—ruined and wretched as I am?'

"'Yes, certainly.'

"'Who?'

"'Why, any neglected old maid, fast sinking in despair, would be delighted to'——

"'No, no,' said he—'it must be somebody that I can love.'

"'Why, you just said you never could be in love again!'

"'Well, love is not the word—but somebody that I can like. I'll search all England through, at all events!' he cried, with a sudden burst of hope, or desperation. 'Succeed or fail, it will be better than rushing headlong to destruction at that d——d club: so farewell to it and you. Whenever I meet you on honest ground or under a Christian roof, I shall be glad to see you; but never more shall you entice me to that devil's den!'

"This was shameful language, but I shook hands with him, and we parted. He kept his word; and from that time forward, he has been a pattern of propriety, as far as I can tell; but, till lately, I have not had very much to do with him. He occasionally sought my company, but as frequently shrunk from it, fearing lest I should wile him back to destruction, and

I found his not very entertaining, especially, as he sometimes attempted to awaken my conscience and draw me from the perdition he considered himself to have escaped; but when I did happen to meet him, I seldom failed to ask after the progress of his matrimonial efforts and researches, and, in general, he could give me but a poor account. The mothers were repelled by his empty coffers and his reputation for gambling, and the daughters by his cloudy brow and melancholy temper—besides, he didn't understand them; he wanted the spirit and assurance to carry his point.

"I left him at it when I went to the Continent; and on my return, at the year's end, I found him still a disconsolate bachelor—though, certainly, looking somewhat less like an unblest exile from the tomb than before. The young ladies had ceased to be afraid of him, and were beginning to think him quite interesting; but the mammas were still unrelenting. It was about this time, Helen, that my good angel brought me into conjunction with you; and then I had eyes and ears for nobody else. But, meantime, Lowborough became acquainted with our charming friend Miss Wilmot—through the intervention of his good angel, no doubt he would tell you, though he did not dare to fix his hopes on one so courted and admired, till after they were brought into closer contact here at Staningley, and she, in the absence of her other admirers, indubitably courted his notice and held out every encouragement to his timid advances. Then, indeed, he began to hope for a dawn of brighter days; and if, for a while, I darkened his prospects by standing between him and his sun—and so, nearly plunged him again into the abyss of despair—it only intensified his ardour and strengthened his hopes when I chose to abandon the field in the pursuit of a brighter treasure. In a word, as I told you, he is fairly besotted. At first, he could dimly

perceive her faults, and they gave him considerable uneasiness; but now his passion and her art together have blinded him to everything but her perfections and his amazing good fortune. Last night, he came to me brimful of his new-found felicity—

"'Huntingdon, I am not a cast-away!' said he, seizing my hand and squeezing it like a vice. 'There is happiness in store for me, yet—even in this life—she loves me!'

"'Indeed!' said I. 'Has she told you so?'

"'No, but I can no longer doubt it. Do you not see how pointedly kind and affectionate she is? And she knows the utmost extent of my poverty, and cares nothing about it! She knows all the folly and all the wickedness of my former life, and is not afraid to trust me—and my rank and title are no allurements to her; for them she utterly disregards. She is the most generous, high-minded being that can be conceived of. She will save me, body and soul, from destruction. Already, she has ennobled me in my own estimation, and made me three times better, wiser, greater than I was. Oh! if I had but known her before, how much degradation and misery I should have been spared! But what have I done to deserve so magnificent a creature?'

"And the cream of the jest," continued Mr Huntingdon, laughing, "is, that the artful minx loves nothing about him but his title and pedigree, and 'that delightful old family seat.'"

"How do you know?" said I.

"She told me so herself; she said, 'As for the man himself, I thoroughly despise him; but then, I suppose, it is time to be making my choice, and if I waited for some one capable of eliciting my esteem and affection, I should have to pass my life in single blessedness, for I detest you all!' Ha, ha! I suspect

she was wrong there; but, however, it is evident she has no love for him, poor fellow."

"Then you ought to tell him so."

"What! and spoil all her plans and prospects, poor girl? No, no: that would be a breach of confidence, wouldn't it, Helen? Ha, ha! Besides, it would break his heart." And he laughed again.

"Well, Mr Huntingdon, I don't know what you see so amazingly diverting in the matter; I see nothing to laugh at."

"I'm laughing at you, just now, love," said he, redoubling his cachinnations.

And leaving him to enjoy his merriment alone, I touched Ruby with the whip and cantered on to rejoin our companions; for we had been walking our horses all this time, and were consequently a long way behind. Arthur was soon at my side again; but not disposed to talk to him, I broke into a gallop. He did the same; and we did not slacken our pace till we came up with Miss Wilmot and Lord Lowborough, which was within half a mile of the park gates. I avoided all further conversation with him, till we came to the end of our ride, when I meant to jump off my horse and vanish into the house, before he could offer his assistance; but while I was disengaging my habit from the crutch, he lifted me off, and held me by both hands, asserting that he would not let me go till I had forgiven him.

"I have nothing to forgive," said I. "You have not injured me."

"No, darling—God forbid that I should! but you are angry, because it was to me that Annabella confessed her lack of esteem for her lover."

"No, Arthur, it is not that that displeases me: it is the whole system of your conduct towards your friend; and if you wish me to forget it, go, now, and tell him

what sort of a woman it is that he adores so madly, and on whom he has hung his hopes of future happiness."

"I tell you, Helen, it would break his heart—it would be the death of him—besides being a scandalous trick to poor Annabella. There is no help for him now; he is past praying for. Besides, she may keep up the deception to the end of the chapter; and then he will be just as happy in the illusion as if it were reality; or perhaps, he will only discover his mistake when he has ceased to love her; and if not, it is much better that the truth should dawn gradually upon him. So now, my angel, I hope I have made out a clear case, and fully convinced you that I cannot make the atonement you require. What other requisition have you to make? Speak, and I will gladly obey."

"I have none but this," said I, as gravely as before; "that, in future, you will never make a jest of the sufferings of others, and always use your influence with your friends for their own advantage against their evil propensities, instead of seconding their evil propensities against themselves."

"I will do my utmost," said he, "to remember and perform the injunctions of my angel monitress;" and after kissing both my gloved hands, he let me go.

When I entered my room, I was surprised to see Annabella Wilmot standing before my toilet table, composedly surveying her features in the glass, with one hand flirting her gold-mounted whip, and the other holding up her long habit.

"She certainly is a magnificent creature!" thought I, as I beheld that tall, finely-developed figure, and the reflection of the handsome face in the mirror before me, with the glossy dark hair, slightly and not ungracefully disordered by the breezy ride, the rich brown complexion glowing with exercise, and the black eyes

sparkling with unwonted brilliance. On perceiving me, she turned round, exclaiming, with a laugh that savoured more of malice than of mirth—

"Why, Helen! what have you been doing so long? I came to tell you my good fortune," she continued, regardless of Rachel's presence. "Lord Lowborough has proposed, and I have been graciously pleased to accept him. Don't you envy me, dear?"

"No, love," said I—"or him either," I mentally added. "And do you like him, Annabella?"

"Like him! yes, to be sure—over head and ears in love!"

"Well, I hope you'll make him a good wife."

"Thank you, my dear! And what besides do you hope?"

"I hope you will both love each other, and both be happy."

"Thanks; and I hope you will make a very good wife to Mr Huntingdon!" said she, with a queenly bow, and retired.

"Oh, miss! how could you say so to her!" cried Rachel.

"Say what?" replied I.

"Why, that you hoped she would make him a good wife. I never heard such a thing!"

"Because, I do hope it—or rather, I wish it—she's almost past hope."

"Well!" said she, "I'm sure I hope he'll make her a good husband. They tell queer things about him downstairs. They were saying"——

"I know, Rachel. I've heard all about him; but he's reformed now. And they have no business to tell tales about their masters."

"No, mum—or else, they have said some things about Mr Huntingdon, too."

"I won't hear them, Rachel; they tell lies."

"Yes, mum," said she quietly, as she went on arranging my hair.

"Do you believe them, Rachel?" I asked, after a short pause.

"No, miss, not all. You know when a lot of servants gets together they like to talk about their betters; and some, for a bit of swagger, likes to make it appear as though they knew more than they do, and to throw out hints and things just to astonish the others. But I think if I was you, Miss Helen, I'd look very well before I leaped. I do believe a young lady can't be too careful who she marries."

"Of course not," said I; "but be quick, will you, Rachel; I want to be dressed."

And, indeed, I was anxious to be rid of the good woman, for I was in such a melancholy frame I could hardly keep the tears out of my eyes while she dressed me. It was not for Lord Lowborough—it was not for Annabella—it was not for myself—it was for Arthur Huntingdon that they rose.

. . . . . .

13*th*.—They are gone—and he is gone. We are to be parted for more than two months—above ten weeks! a long, long time to live and not to see him. But he has promised to write often, and made me promise to write still oftener, because he will be busy settling his affairs, and I shall have nothing better to do. Well, I think I shall always have plenty to say. But oh! for the time when we shall be always together, and can exchange our thoughts without the intervention of these cold go-betweens, pen, ink, and paper!

. . . . . .

22*nd*.—I have had several letters from Arthur, already. They are not long, but passing sweet, and just like himself—full of ardent affection, and playful lively humour; but—there is always a "but" in this imperfect

world—and I do wish he would sometimes be serious. I cannot get him to write or speak in real, solid earnest. I don't much mind it now, but if it be always so, what shall I do with the serious part of myself?

——o——

Chapter xxiij.

Feb. 18*th*, 1822.

EARLY this morning, Arthur mounted his hunter and set off in high glee to meet the —— hounds. He will be away all day, and so I will amuse myself with my neglected diary, if I can give that name to such an irregular composition. It is exactly four months since I opened it last.

I am married now, and settled down as Mrs Huntingdon of Grassdale Manor. I have had eight weeks' experience of matrimony. And do I regret the step I have taken? No, though I must confess, in my secret heart, that Arthur is not what I thought him at first, and if I had known him in the beginning as thoroughly as I do now, I probably never should have loved him, and if I loved him first, and then made the discovery, I fear I should have thought it my duty not to have married him. To be sure I might have known him, for every one was willing enough to tell me about him, and he himself was no accomplished hypocrite, but I was wilfully blind, and now, instead of regretting that I did not discern his full character before I was indissolubly bound to him, I am glad, for it has saved me a great deal of battling with my conscience, and a great deal of consequent trouble and pain; and, whatever I ought to have done, my duty now is plainly to love him and to cleave to him, and this just tallies with my inclination.

He is very fond of me—almost too fond. I could do with less caressing and more rationality. I should like to be less of a pet and more of a friend if I might choose, but I won't complain of that! I am only afraid his affection loses in depth where it gains in ardour. I sometimes liken it to a fire of dry twigs and branches compared with one of solid coal—very bright and hot; but if it should burn itself out and leave nothing but ashes behind, what shall I do? But it won't—it shan't, I am determined—and surely I have power to keep it alive. So let me dismiss that thought at once. But Arthur is selfish; I am constrained to acknowledge that; and, indeed, the admission gives me less pain than might be expected, for, since I love him so much, I can easily forgive him for loving himself: he likes to be pleased, and it is my delight to please him, and when I regret this tendency of his it is for his own sake, not for mine.

The first instance he gave was on the occasion of our bridal tour. He wanted to hurry it over, for all the Continental scenes were already familiar to him: many had lost their interest in his eyes, and others had never had anything to lose. The consequence was, that after a flying transit, through part of France and part of Italy, I came back nearly as ignorant as I went, having made no acquaintance with persons and manners, and very little with things, my head swarming with a motley confusion of objects and scenes—some, it is true, leaving a deeper and more pleasing impression than others, but these embittered by the recollection that my emotions had not been shared by my companion, but that, on the contrary, when I had expressed a particular interest in anything that I saw or desired to see, it had been displeasing to him, inasmuch as it proved that I could take delight in anything disconnected with himself.

As for Paris, we only just touched at that, and he

would not give me time to see one-tenth of the beauties and interesting objects of Rome. He wanted to get me home, he said, to have me all to himself, and to see me safely installed as the mistress of Grassdale Manor, just as single-minded, as naïve, and piquant as I was; and, as if I had been some frail butterfly, he expressed himself fearful of rubbing the silver off my wings by bringing me into contact with society, especially that of Paris and Rome; and, moreover, he did not scruple to tell me that there were ladies in both places that would tear his eyes out if they happened to meet him with me.

Of course I was vexed at all this; but, still, it was less the disappointment to myself that annoyed me, than the disappointment in him, and the trouble I was at to frame excuses to my friends for having seen and observed so little, without imputing one particle of blame to my companion. But when we got home—to my new, delightful home—I was so happy and he was so kind that I freely forgave him all; and I was beginning to think my lot too happy, and my husband actually too good for me, if not too good for this world, when, on the second Sunday after our arrival, he shocked and horrified me by another instance of his unreasonable exaction. We were walking home from the morning service, for it was a fine frosty day, and, as we are so near the church, I had requested the carriage should not be used.

"Helen," said he, with unusual gravity, "I am not quite satisfied with you."

I desired to know what was wrong.

"But will you promise to reform if I tell you?"

"Yes, if I can, and without offending a higher authority."

"Ah! there it is, you see, you don't love me with all your heart."

"I don't understand you, Arthur (at least I hope I don't): pray tell me what I have done or said amiss?"

"It is nothing you have done or said; it is something that you are—you are too religious. Now I like a woman to be religious, and I think your piety one of your greatest charms, but then, like all other good things, it may be carried too far. To my thinking, a woman's religion ought not to lessen her devotion to her earthly lord. She should have enough to purify and etherealise her soul, but not enough to refine away her heart, and raise her above all human sympathies."

"And am I above all human sympathies?" said I.

"No, darling; but you are making more progress towards that saintly condition than I like; for all these two hours I have been thinking of you and wanting to catch your eye, and you were so absorbed in your devotions that you had not even a glance to spare for me—I declare it is enough to make one jealous of one's Maker—which is very wrong, you know; so don't excite such wicked passions again for my soul's sake."

"I will give my whole heart and soul to my Maker if I can," I answered, "and not one atom more of it to you than He allows. What are you, sir, that you should set yourself up as a god, and presume to dispute possession of my heart with Him to whom I owe all I have and all I am, every blessing I ever did or ever can enjoy—and yourself among the rest—if you are a blessing, which I am half inclined to doubt.

"Don't be so hard upon me, Helen; and don't pinch my arm so, you're squeezing your fingers into the bone."

"Arthur," continued I, relaxing my hold of his arm, "you don't love me half as much as I do you; and yet, if you loved me far less than you do I would not complain, provided you loved your Maker more. I should rejoice to see you at any time so deeply absorbed in your devotions that you had not a single thought to spare for me. But, indeed, I should lose nothing by

the change, for the more you loved your God the more deep and pure and true would be your love to me."

At this he only laughed and kissed my hand, calling me a sweet enthusiast. Then taking off his hat, he added—

"But look here, Helen—what can a man do with such a head as this?"

The head looked right enough, but when he placed my hand on the top of it, it sunk in a bed of curls, rather alarmingly low, especially in the middle.

"You see I was not made to be a saint," said he, laughing. "If God meant me to be religious, why didn't He give me a proper organ of veneration?"

"You are like the servant," I replied, "who, instead of employing his one talent in his master's service, restored it to him unimproved, alleging, as an excuse, that he knew him 'to be a hard man, reaping where he had not sown, and gathering where he had not strawed.' Of him to whom less is given, less will be required, but our utmost exertions are required of us all. You are not without the capacity of veneration, and faith and hope, and conscience and reason, and every other requisite to a Christian's character if you choose to employ them; but all our talents increase in the using, and every faculty, both good and bad, strengthens by exercise: therefore, if you choose to use the bad, or those which tend to evil, till they become your masters, and neglect the good till they dwindle away, you have only yourself to blame. But you have talents, Arthur, natural endowments both of heart and mind and temper, such as many a better Christian would be glad to possess, if you would only employ them in God's service. I should never expect to see you a devotee, but it is quite possible to be a good Christian without ceasing to be a happy, merry-hearted man."

"You speak like an oracle, Helen, and all you say is

indisputably true; but listen here: I am hungry, and I see before me a good substantial dinner; I am told that if I abstain from this to-day I shall have a sumptuous feast to-morrow, consisting of all manner of dainties and delicacies. Now in the first place, I should be loath to wait till to-morrow when I have the means of appeasing my hunger already before me: in the second place, the solid viands of to-day are more to my taste than the dainties that are promised me; in the third place, I don't see to-morrow's banquet, and how can I tell that it is not all a fable, got up by the greasy-faced fellow that is advising me to abstain in order that he may have all the good victuals to himself? in the fourth place, this table must be spread for somebody, and, as Solomon says, 'Who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto more than I?' and finally, with your leave, I'll sit down and satisfy my cravings of to-day, and leave to-morrow to shift for itself—who knows but what I may secure both this and that?"

"But you are not required to abstain from the substantial dinner of to-day: you are only advised to partake of these coarser viands in such moderation as not to incapacitate you from enjoying the choicer banquet of to-morrow. If, regardless of that counsel, you choose to make a beast of yourself now, and over-eat and over-drink yourself till you turn the good victuals into poison, who is to blame if, hereafter, while you are suffering the torments of yesterday's gluttony and drunkenness, you see more temperate men sitting down to enjoy themselves at that splendid entertainment which you are unable to taste?"

"Most true, my patron saint; but again, our friend Solomon says, 'There is nothing better for a man than to eat and to drink and to be merry.'"

"And again," returned I, "he says, 'Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and walk in the ways of

thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment.'"

"Well but, Helen, I'm sure I've been very good these last few weeks. What have you seen amiss in me, and what would you have me to do?"

"Nothing more than you do, Arthur: your actions are all right so far; but I would have your thoughts changed: I would have you to fortify yourself against temptation, and not to call evil good, and good evil; I should wish you to think more deeply, to look further, and aim higher than you do."

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Chapter xxiv.

March 25th.

ARTHUR is getting tired—not of me, I trust, but of the idle, quiet life he leads—and no wonder, for he has so few sources of amusement: he never reads anything but newspapers and sporting magazines; and when he sees me occupied with a book he won't let me rest till I close it. In fine weather he generally manages to get through the time pretty well, but on rainy days, of which we have had a good many of late, it is quite painful to witness his ennui. I do all I can to amuse him, but it is impossible to get him to feel interested in what I most like to talk about, while, on the other hand, he likes to talk about things that cannot interest me —or even that annoy me—and these please him the most of all; for his favourite amusement is to sit or loll beside me on the sofa, and tell me stories of his former amours, always turning upon the ruin of some confiding girl or the cozening of some unsuspecting husband; and when I express my horror and indignation he lays it all to

the charge of jealousy, and laughs till the tears run down his cheeks. I used to fly into passions or melt into tears at first, but seeing that his delight increased in proportion to my anger and agitation, I have since endeavoured to suppress my feelings and receive his revelations in the silence of calm contempt; but still he reads the inward struggle in my face, and misconstrues my bitterness of soul for his unworthiness into the pangs of wounded jealousy; and when he has sufficiently diverted himself with that, or fears my displeasure will become too serious for his comfort, he tries to kiss and soothe me into smiles again—never were his caresses so little welcome as then! This is double selfishness displayed to me and to the victims of his former love. There are times when, with a momentary pang—a flash of wild dismay, I ask myself, "Helen, what have you done?" But I rebuke the inward questioner, and repel the obtrusive thoughts that crowd upon me; for were he ten times as sensual and impenetrable to good and lofty thoughts, I well know I have no right to complain. And I don't and won't complain. I do and will love him still; and I do not and will not regret that I have linked my fate with his.

April 4th.—We have had a downright quarrel. The particulars are as follows:—Arthur had told me, at different intervals, the whole story of his intrigue with Lady F——, which I would not believe before. It was some consolation, however, to find that in this instance the lady had been more to blame than he, for he was very young at the time, and she had decidedly made the first advances, if what he said was true. I hated her for it, for it seemed as if she had chiefly contributed to his corruption, and when he was beginning to talk about her the other day, I begged he would not mention her, for I detested the very sound of her name.

"Not because you loved her, Arthur, mind, but because she injured you and deceived her husband, and was altogether a very abominable woman, whom you ought to be ashamed to mention."

But he defended her by saying that she had a doting old husband, whom it was impossible to love.

"Then why did she marry him?" said I.

"For his money," was the reply.

"Then that was another crime, and her solemn promise to love and honour him was another, that only increased the enormity of the last."

"You are too severe upon the poor lady," laughed he. "But never mind, Helen, I don't care for her now; and I never loved any of them half as much as I do you, so you needn't fear to be forsaken like them."

"If you had told me these things before, Arthur, I never should have given you the chance."

"Wouldn't you, my darling?"

"Most certainly not!"

He laughed incredulously.

"I wish I could convince you of it now!" cried I, starting up from beside him; and for the first time in my life, and I hope the last, I wished I had not married him.

"Helen," said he, more gravely, "do you know that if I believed you now I should be very angry? but thank Heaven I don't. Though you stand there with your white face and flashing eyes, looking at me like a very tigress, I know the heart within you perhaps a trifle better than you know it yourself."

Without another word I left the room and locked myself up in my own chamber. In about half-an-hour he came to the door, and first he tried the handle, then he knocked.

"Won't you let me in, Helen?" said he.

"No; you have displeased me," I replied, "and I don't want to see your face or hear your voice again till the morning."

He paused a moment as if dumfoundered or uncertain how to answer such a speech, and then turned and walked away. This was only an hour after dinner: I knew he would find it very dull to sit alone all the evening; and this considerably softened my resentment though it did not make me relent. I was determined to show him that my heart was not his slave, and I could live without him if I chose; and I sat down and wrote a long letter to my aunt—of course telling her nothing of all this. Soon after ten o'clock I heard him come up again, but he passed my door and went straight to his own dressing-room, where he shut himself in for the night.

I was rather anxious to see how he would meet me in the morning, and not a little disappointed to behold him enter the breakfast-room with a careless smile.

"Are you cross still, Helen?" said he, approaching as if to salute me. I coldly turned to the table, and began to pour out the coffee, observing that he was rather late.

He uttered a low whistle and sauntered away to the window, where he stood for some minutes looking out upon the pleasing prospect of sullen, grey clouds, streaming rain, soaking lawn, and dripping, leafless trees, and muttering execrations on the weather, and then sat down to breakfast. While taking his coffee he muttered it was "d——d cold."

"You should not have left it so long," said I.

He made no answer, and the meal was concluded in silence. It was a relief to both when the letter-bag was brought in. It contained upon examination a newspaper and one or two letters for him, and a couple of letters for me, which he tossed across the table

without a remark. One was from my brother, the other from Milicent Hargrave, who is now in London with her mother. His, I think, were business letters, and apparently not much to his mind, for he crushed them into his pocket with some muttered expletives that I should have reproved him for at any other time. The paper, he set before him, and pretended to be deeply absorbed in its contents during the remainder of breakfast, and a considerable time after.

The reading and answering of my letters, and the direction of household concerns, afforded me ample employment for the morning: after lunch I got my drawing, and from dinner till bed-time I read. Meanwhile, poor Arthur was sadly at a loss for something to amuse him or to occupy his time. He wanted to appear as busy and as unconcerned as I did: had the weather at all permitted he would doubtless have ordered his horse and set off to some distant region—no matter where—immediately after breakfast, and not returned till night: had there been a lady anywhere within reach, of any age between fifteen and forty-five, he would have sought revenge and found employment in getting up, or trying to get up, a desperate flirtation with her; but being, to my private satisfaction, entirely cut off from both these sources of diversion, his sufferings were truly deplorable. When he had done yawning over his paper and scribbling short answers to his shorter letters, he spent the remainder of the morning and the whole of the afternoon in fidgeting about from room to room, watching the clouds, cursing the rain, alternately petting and teasing and abusing his dogs, sometimes lounging on the sofa with a book that he could not force himself to read, and very often fixedly gazing at me when he thought I did not perceive it, with the vain hope of detecting some traces of tears, or some tokens of remorseful anguish in my face. But I managed to preserve an undisturbed though

grave serenity throughout the day. I was not really angry: I felt for him all the time, and longed to be reconciled; but I determined he should make the first advances, or at least show some signs of an humble and contrite spirit first; for, if I began, it would only minister to his self-conceit, increase his arrogance, and quite destroy the lesson I wanted to give him.

He made a long stay in the dining-room after dinner, and, I fear, took an unusual quantity of wine, but not enough to loosen his tongue, for when he came in and found me quietly occupied with my book, too busy to lift my head on his entrance, he merely murmured an expression of suppressed disapprobation, and, shutting the door with a bang, went and stretched himself at full length on the sofa, and composed himself to sleep. But his favourite cocker, Dash, that had been lying at my feet, took the liberty of jumping upon him and beginning to lick his face. He struck it off with a smart blow, and the poor dog squeaked, and ran cowering back to me. When he woke up, about half-an-hour after, he called it to him again, but Dash only looked sheepish and wagged the tip of his tail. He called again more sharply, but Dash only clung the closer to me, and licked my hand as if imploring protection. Enraged at this, his master snatched up a heavy book and hurled it at his head. The poor dog set up a piteous outcry and ran to the door. I let him out, and then quietly took up the book.

"Give that book to me," said Arthur, in no very courteous tone. I gave it to him.

"Why did you let the dog out?" he asked. "You knew I wanted him."

"By what token?" I replied; "by your throwing the book at him? but, perhaps, it was intended for me?"

"No; but I see you've got a taste of it," said he,

looking at my hand, that had also been struck, and was rather severely grazed.

I returned to my reading, and he endeavoured to occupy himself in the same manner; but, in a little while, after several portentous yawns, he pronounced his book to be "cursed trash," and threw it on the table. Then followed eight or ten minutes of silence, during the greater part of which, I believe, he was staring at me. At last his patience was tired out.

"What is that book, Helen?" he exclaimed.

I told him.

"Is it interesting?"

"Yes, very."

I went on reading, or pretending to read, at least—I cannot say there was much communication between my eyes and my brain; for, while the former ran over the pages, the latter was earnestly wondering when Arthur would speak next, and what he would say, and what I should answer. But he did not speak again till I rose to make the tea, and then it was only to say he should not take any. He continued lounging on the sofa, and alternately closing his eyes and looking at his watch and at me, till bed-time, when I rose, and took my candle and retired.

"Helen!" cried he, the moment I had left the room. I turned back, and stood awaiting his commands.

"What do you want, Arthur?" I said at length.

"Nothing," replied he. "Go!"

I went, but hearing him mutter something as I was closing the door, I turned again. It sounded very like "confounded slut," but I was quite willing it should be something else.

"Were you speaking, Arthur?" I asked.

"No," was the answer, and I shut the door and departed. I saw nothing more of him till the following

morning at breakfast, when he came down a full hour after the usual time.

"You're very late," was my morning's salutation.

"You needn't have waited for me," was his; and he walked up to the window again. It was just such weather as yesterday.

"Oh, this confounded rain!" he muttered. But, after studiously regarding it for a minute or two, a bright idea seemed to strike him, for he suddenly exclaimed, "But I know what I'll do!" and then returned and took his seat at the table. The letter-bag was already there, waiting to be opened. He unlocked it and examined the contents, but said nothing about them.

"Is there anything for me?" I asked.

"No."

He opened the newspaper and began to read.

"You'd better take your coffee," suggested I; "it will be cold again."

"You may go," said he, "if you've done. I don't want you."

I rose and withdrew to the next room, wondering if we were to have another such miserable day as yesterday, and wishing intensely for an end of these mutually inflicted torments. Shortly after I heard him ring the bell and give some orders about his wardrobe that sounded as if he meditated a long journey. He then sent for the coachman, and I heard something about the carriage and the horses, and London, and seven o'clock to-morrow morning, that startled and disturbed me not a little.

"I must not let him go to London, whatever comes of it," said I to myself; "he will run into all kinds of mischief, and I shall be the cause of it. But the question is, how am I to alter his purpose?—Well, I will wait awhile, and see if he mentions it."

I waited most anxiously, from hour to hour; but not a word was spoken, on that or any other subject, to me. He whistled and talked to his dogs, and wandered from room to room, much the same as on the previous day. At last I began to think I must introduce the subject myself, and was pondering how to bring it about, when John unwittingly came to my relief with the following message from the coachman—

"Please, sir, Richard says one of the horses has got a very bad cold, and he thinks, sir, if you could make it convenient to go the day after to-morrow, instead of to-morrow, he could physic it to-day so as"——

"Confound his impudence!" interjected the master.

"Please, sir, he says it would be a deal better if you could," persisted John, "for he hopes there'll be a change in the weather shortly, and he says it's not likely, when a horse is so bad with a cold, and physicked and all"——

"Devil take the horse!" cried the gentleman—"Well, tell him I'll think about it," he added, after a moment's reflection. He cast a searching glance at me, as the servant withdrew, expecting to see some token of deep astonishment and alarm; but, being previously prepared, I preserved an aspect of stoical indifference. His countenance fell as he met my steady gaze, and he turned away in very obvious disappointment, and walked up to the fireplace, where he stood in an attitude of undisguised dejection, leaning against the chimney-piece with his forehead sunk upon his arm.

"Where do you want to go, Arthur?" said I.

"To London," replied he gravely.

"What for?" I asked.

"Because I cannot be happy here."

"Why not?"

"Because my wife doesn't love me."

"She would love you with all her heart, if you deserved it."

"What must I do to deserve it?"

This seemed humble and earnest enough; and I was so much affected, between sorrow and joy, that I was obliged to pause a few seconds before I could steady my voice to reply.

"If she gives you her heart," said I, "you must take it thankfully, and use it well, and not pull it in pieces, and laugh in her face, because she cannot snatch it away."

He now turned round and stood facing me, with his back to the fire.

"Come then, Helen, are you going to be a good girl?" said he.

This sounded rather too arrogant, and the smile that accompanied it did not please me. I therefore hesitated to reply. Perhaps my former answer had implied too much: he had heard my voice falter, and might have seen me brush away a tear.

"Are you going to forgive me, Helen?" he resumed, more humbly.

"Are you penitent?" I replied, stepping up to him and smiling in his face.

"Heart-broken!" he answered, with a rueful countenance, yet with a merry smile just lurking within his eyes and about the corners of his mouth; but this could not repulse me, and I flew into his arms. He fervently embraced me, and though I shed a torrent of tears, I think I never was happier in my life than at that moment.

"Then you won't go to London, Arthur?" I said, when the first transport of tears and kisses had subsided.

"No, love,—unless you will go with me."

"I will, gladly," I answered, "if you think the

change will amuse you, and if you will put off the journey till next week."

He readily consented, but said there was no need of much preparation, as he should not be for staying long, for he did not wish me to be Londonised, and to lose my country freshness and originality by too much intercourse with the ladies of the world. I thought this folly; but I did not wish to contradict him now: I merely said that I was of very domestic habits, as he well knew, and had no particular wish to mingle with the world.

So we are to go to London on Monday, the day after to-morrow. It is now four days since the termination of our quarrel, and I'm sure it has done us both good: it has made me like Arthur a great deal better, and made him behave a great deal better to me. He has never once attempted to annoy me since, by the most distant allusion to Lady F——, or any of those disagreeable reminiscences of his former life—I wish I could blot them from my memory, or else get him to regard such matters in the same light as I do. Well! it is something, however, to have made him see that they are not fit subjects for a conjugal jest. He may see further some time—I will put no limits to my hopes; and, in spite of my aunt's forebodings and my own unspoken fears, I trust we shall be happy yet.

——o——

Chapter xxb.

ON the eighth of April, we went to London; on the eighth of May I returned, in obedience to Arthur's wish; very much against my own, because I left him behind. If he had come with me, I should have been very glad to get home again, for

he led me such a round of restless dissipation, while there, that, in that short space of time, I was quite tired out. He seemed bent upon displaying me to his friends and acquaintances in particular, and the public in general, on every possible occasion, and to the greatest possible advantage. It was something to feel that he considered me a worthy object of pride; but I paid dear for the gratification, for, in the first place, to please him, I had to violate my cherished predilections—my almost rooted principles in favour of a plain, dark, sober style of dress; I must sparkle in costly jewels, and deck myself out like a painted butterfly, just as I had, long since, determined I would never do—and this was no trifling sacrifice;—in the second place, I was continually straining to satisfy his sanguine expectations and do honour to his choice, by my general conduct and deportment, and fearing to disappoint him by some awkward misdemeanour, or some trait of inexperienced ignorance about the customs of society, especially when I acted the part of hostess, which I was not unfrequently called upon to do; and in the third place, as I intimated before, I was wearied of the throng and bustle, the restless hurry and ceaseless change of a life so alien to all my previous habits. At last, he suddenly discovered that the London air did not agree with me, and I was languishing for my country home, and must immediately return to Grassdale.

I laughingly assured him that the case was not so urgent as he appeared to think it, but I was quite willing to go home if he was. He replied that he should be obliged to remain a week or two longer, as he had business that required his presence.

"Then I will stay with you," said I.

"But I can't do with you, Helen," was his answer: "as long as you stay, I shall attend to you and neglect my business."

"But I won't let you," I returned: "now that I know you have business to attend to, I shall insist upon your attending to it, and letting me alone—and, to tell the truth, I shall be glad of a little rest. I can take my rides and walks in the park as usual; and your business cannot occupy all your time; I shall see you at meal-times and in the evenings, at least, and that will be better than being leagues away and never seeing you at all."

"But, my love, I cannot let you stay. How can I settle my affairs when I know that you are here, neglected"——

"I shall not feel myself neglected: while you are doing your duty, Arthur, I shall never complain of neglect. If you had told me before, that you had anything to do, it would have been half done before this; and now you must make up for lost time by redoubled exertions. Tell me what it is; and I will be your taskmaster, instead of being a hindrance."

"No, no," persisted the impracticable creature; "you must go home, Helen; I must have the satisfaction of knowing that you are safe and well, though far away. Your bright eyes are faded, and that tender, delicate bloom has quite deserted your cheek."

"That is only with too much gaiety and fatigue."

"It is not, I tell you; it is the London air: you are pining for the fresh breezes of your country home—and you shall feel them, before you are two days older. And remember your situation, dearest Helen; on your health, you know, depends the health, if not the life, of our future hope."

"Then you really wish to get rid of me?"

"Positively, I do; and I will take you down myself to Grassdale, and then return. I shall not be absent above a week—or fortnight at most."

"But if I must go, I will go alone: if you must

stay, it is needless to waste your time in the journey there and back."

But he did not like the idea of sending me alone.

"Why, what helpless creature do you take me for," I replied, "that you cannot trust me to go a hundred miles in our own carriage with our own footman and a maid to attend me? If you come with me I shall assuredly keep you. But tell me, Arthur, what is this tiresome business; and why did you never mention it before?"

"It is only a little business with my lawyer," said he; and he told me something about a piece of property he wanted to sell in order to pay off a part of the incumbrances on his estate; but either the account was a little confused, or I was rather dull of comprehension, for I could not clearly understand how that should keep him in town a fortnight after me. Still less can I now comprehend how it should keep him a month—for it is nearly that time since I left him, and no signs of his return as yet. In every letter he promises to be with me in a few days, and every time deceives me—or deceives himself. His excuses are vague and insufficient. I cannot doubt that he is got among his former companions again—Oh, why did I leave him! I wish—I do intensely wish he would return!

June 29th.—No Arthur yet; and for many days I have been looking and longing in vain for a letter. His letters, when they come, are kind—if fair words and endearing epithets can give them a claim to the title—but very short, and full of trivial excuses and promises that I cannot trust; and yet how anxiously I look forward to them! how eagerly I open and devour one of those little, hastily-scribbled returns for the three or four long letters, hitherto unanswered, he has had from me!

Oh, it is cruel to leave me so long alone! He knows I have no one but Rachel to speak to, for we have no

beighbours here, except the Hargraves, whose residence I can dimly descry from these upper windows embosomed among those low, woody hills beyond the Dale. I was glad when I learnt that Milicent was so near us; and her company would be a soothing solace to me now, but she is still in town with her mother: there is no one at the Grove but little Esther and her French governess, for Walter is always away. I saw that paragon of manly perfections in London: he seemed scarcely to merit the eulogiums of his mother and sister, though he certainly appeared more conversable and agreeable than Lord Lowborough, more candid and high-minded than Mr Grimsby, and more polished and gentlemanly than Mr Hattersley, Arthur's only other friend whom he judged fit to introduce to me.—Oh, Arthur, why won't you come! why won't you write to me at least! You talked about my health—how can you expect me to gather bloom and vigour here; pining in solitude and restless anxiety from day to day? —It would serve you right to come back and find my good looks entirely wasted away. I would beg my uncle and aunt, or my brother, to come and see me, but I do not like to complain of my loneliness to them, —and indeed, loneliness is the least of my sufferings; but what is he doing—what is it that keeps him away? It is this ever-recurring question and the horrible suggestions it raises that distract me.

July 3rd.—My last bitter letter has wrung from him an answer at last,—and a rather longer one than usual; but still I don't know what to make of it. He playfully abuses me for the gall and vinegar of my latest effusion, tells me I can have no conception of the multitudinous engagements that keep him away, but avers that, in spite of them all, he will assuredly be with me before the close of next week; though it is impossible for a man, so circumstanced as he is, to fix the precise

day of his return: meantime he exhorts me to the exercise of patience, "that first of woman's virtues," and desires me to remember the saying, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," and comfort myself with the assurance that the longer he stays away, the better he shall love me when he returns; and till he does return, he begs I will continue to write to him constantly, for, though he is sometimes too idle and often too busy to answer my letters as they come, he likes to receive them daily, and if I fulfil my threat of punishing his seeming neglect by ceasing to write, he shall be so angry that he will do his utmost to forget me. He adds this piece of intelligence respecting poor Milicent Hargrave—

"Your little friend Milicent is likely, before long, to follow your example, and take upon her the yoke of matrimony in conjunction with a friend of mine. Hattersley, you know, has not yet fulfilled his direful threat of throwing his precious person away on the first old maid that chose to evince a tenderness for him; but he still preserves a resolute determination to see himself a married man before the year is out: 'Only,' said he to me, 'I must have somebody that will let me have my own way in everything—not like your wife, Huntingdon; she is a charming creature, but she looks as if she had a will of her own, and could play the vixen upon occasion' (I thought 'you're right there, man,' but I didn't say so). 'I must have some good, quiet soul that will let me just do what I like and go where I like, keep at home or stay away, without a word of reproach or complaint; for I can't do with being bothered.' 'Well,' said I, 'I know somebody that will suit you to a tee, if you don't care for money, and that's Hargrave's sister, Milicent.' He desired to be introduced to her forthwith, for he said he had plenty of the needful himself—or should have, when his old

governor chose to quit the stage. So you see, Helen, I have managed pretty well, both for your friend and mine."

Poor Milicent! But I cannot imagine she will ever be led to accept such a suitor—one so repugnant to all her ideas of a man to be honoured and loved.

5th.—Alas! I was mistaken. I have got a long letter from her this morning, telling me she is already engaged, and expects to be married before the close of the month.

"I hardly know what to say about it," she writes, "or what to think. To tell you the truth, Helen, I don't like the thoughts of it at all. If I am to be Mr Hattersley's wife, I must try to love him; and I do try with all my might; but I have made very little progress yet; and the worst symptom of the case is, that the further he is from me the better I like him: he frightens me with his abrupt manners and strange hectoring ways, and I dread the thoughts of marrying him. 'Then why have you accepted him?' you will ask; and I didn't know I had accepted him; but mamma tells me I have, and he seems to think so too. I certainly didn't mean to do so; but I did not like to give him a flat refusal for fear mamma should be grieved and angry (for I knew she wished me to marry him), and I wanted to talk to her first about it, so I gave him what I thought was an evasive, half negative answer; but she says it was as good as an acceptance, and he would think me very capricious if I were to attempt to draw back—and indeed, I was so confused and frightened at the moment, I can hardly tell what I said. And next time I saw him, he accosted me in all confidence as his affianced bride, and immediately began to settle matters with mamma. I had not courage to contradict them then, and how can I do it now? I cannot: they would think me mad. Besides, mamma

is so delighted with the idea of the match; she thinks she has managed so well for me; and I cannot bear to disappoint her. I do object sometimes, and tell her what I feel, but you don't know how she talks. Mr Hattersley, you know, is the son of a rich banker, and as Esther and I have no fortunes, and Walter very little, our dear mamma is very anxious to see us all well married, that is, united to rich partners—it is not my idea of being well married, but she means it all for the best. She says when I am safe off her hands it will be such a relief to her mind; and she assures me it will be a good thing for the family as well as for me. Even Walter is pleased at the prospect, and when I confessed my reluctance to him, he said it was all childish nonsense. Do you think it nonsense, Helen? I should not care if I could see any prospect of being able to love and admire him, but I can't. There is nothing about him to hang one's esteem and affection upon: he is so diametrically opposite to what I imagined my husband should be. Do write to me, and say all you can to encourage me. Don't attempt to dissuade me, for my fate is fixed: preparations for the important event are already going on around me; and don't say a word against Mr Hattersley, for I want to think well of him; and though I have spoken against him myself, it is for the last time; hereafter, I shall never permit myself to utter a word in his dispraise, however he may seem to deserve it; and whoever ventures to speak slightingly of the man I have promised to love, to honour, and obey, must expect my serious displeasure. After all, I think he is quite as good as Mr Huntingdon, if not better; and yet, you love him, and seem to be happy and contented; and perhaps I may manage as well. You must tell me, if you can, that Mr Hattersley is better than he seems—that he is upright, honourable, and open-hearted—in fact, a perfect

diamond in the rough. He may be all this, but I don't know him. I know only the exterior and what I trust is the worst part of him."

She concludes with "Good-bye, dear Helen, I am waiting anxiously for your advice—but mind you let it be all on the right side."

Alas! poor Milicent, what encouragement can I give you? or what advice—except that it is better to make a bold stand now, though at the expense of disappointing and angering both mother and brother, and lover, than to devote your whole life, hereafter, to misery and vain regret?

Saturday, 13*th*.—The week is over, and he is not come. All the sweet summer is passing away without one breath of pleasure to me or benefit to him. And I had all along been looking forward to this season with the fond, delusive hope that we should enjoy it so sweetly together; and that, with God's help and my exertions, it would be the means of elevating his mind, and refining his taste to a due appreciation of the salutary and pure delights of nature, and peace, and holy love. But now—at evening, when I see the round, red sun sink quietly down behind those woody hills, leaving them sleeping in a warm, red, golden haze, I only think another lovely day is lost to him and me; and at morning, when roused by the flutter and chirp of the sparrows, and the gleeful twitter of the swallows—all intent upon feeding their young, and full of life and joy in their own little frames—I open the window to inhale the balmy, soul-reviving air, and look out upon the lovely landscape, laughing in dew and sunshine—I too often shame that glorious scene with tears of thankless misery, because he cannot feel its freshening influence; and when I wander in the ancient woods, and meet the little wild-flowers smiling in my path, or sit in the shadow of our noble ash-trees by the water-side,

with their branches gently swaying in the light summer breeze that murmurs through their feathery foliage—my ears full of that low music mingled with the dreamy hum of insects, my eyes abstractedly gazing on the glassy surface of the little lake before me, with the trees that crowd about its bank, some gracefully bending to kiss its waters, some rearing their stately heads high above, but stretching their wide arms over its margin, all faithfully mirrored far, far down in its glassy depth—though sometimes the images are partially broken by the sport of aquatic insects, and sometimes, for a moment, the whole is shivered into trembling fragments by a transient breeze that swept the surface too roughly—still I have no pleasure; for the greater the happiness that nature sets before me, the more I lament that he is not here to taste it: the greater the bliss we might enjoy together, the more I feel our present wretchedness apart (yes, ours; he must be wretched though he may not know it); and the more my senses are pleased, the more my heart is oppressed; for he keeps it with him confined amid the dust and smoke of London—perhaps, shut up within the walls of his own abominable club.

But most of all, at night, when I enter my lonely chamber, and look out upon the summer moon, "sweet regent of the sky," floating above me in the "black blue vault of heaven," shedding a flood of silver radiance over park, and wood, and water, so pure, so peaceful, so divine—and think, Where is he now?—what is he doing at this moment? wholly unconscious of this heavenly scene—perhaps, revelling with his boon companions, perhaps—God help me, it is too—too much!

23*rd*.—Thank Heaven, he is come at last! But how altered! flushed and feverish, listless and languid, his beauty strangely diminished, his vigour and vivacity

quite departed. I have not upbraided him by word or look; I have not even asked him what he has been doing. I have not the heart to do it, for I think he is ashamed of himself—he must be so indeed, and such inquiries could not fail to be painful to both. My forbearance pleases him—touches him even, I am inclined to think. He says he is glad to be home again, and God knows how glad I am to get him back, even as he is. He lies on the sofa nearly all day long; and I play and sing to him for hours together. I write his letters for him, and get him everything he wants; and sometimes I read to him, and sometimes I talk, and sometimes only sit by him and soothe him with silent caresses. I know he does not deserve it; and I fear I am spoiling him; but this once, I will forgive him, freely and entirely. I will shame him into virtue if I can, and I will never let him leave me again.

He is pleased with my attentions—it may be, grateful for them. He likes to have me near him; and though he is peevish and testy with his servants and his dogs, he is gentle and kind to me. What he would be, if I did not so watchfully anticipate his wants, and so carefully avoid, or immediately desist from doing anything that has a tendency to irritate or disturb him, with however little reason, I cannot tell. How intensely I wish he were worthy of all this care! Last night as I sat beside him, with his head in my lap, passing my fingers through his beautiful curls, this thought made my eyes overflow with sorrowful tears—as it often does; but this time, a tear fell on his face and made him look up. He smiled, but not insultingly.

"Dear Helen!" he said—"why do you cry? you know that I love you" (and he pressed my hand to his feverish lips), "and what more could you desire?"

"Only, Arthur, that you would love yourself, as truly and as faithfully as you are loved by me."

"That would be hard, indeed!" he replied, tenderly squeezing my hand.

August 24th.—Arthur is himself again, as lusty and reckless, as light of heart and head as ever, and as restless and hard to amuse as a spoilt child, and almost as full of mischief too, especially when wet weather keeps him within doors. I wish he had something to do, some useful trade, or profession, or employment—anything to occupy his head or his hands for a few hours a day, and give him something besides his own pleasure to think about. If he would play the country gentleman, and attend to the farm—but that he knows nothing about, and won't give his mind to consider,—or if he would take up with some literary study, or learn to draw or to play—as he is so fond of music, I often try to persuade him to learn the piano, but he is far too idle for such an undertaking: he has no more idea of exerting himself to overcome obstacles than he has of restraining his natural appetites; and these two things are the ruin of him. I lay them both to the charge of his harsh yet careless father, and his madly indulgent mother. If ever I am a mother I will zealously strive against this crime of over-indulgence. I can hardly give it a milder name when I think of the evils it brings.

Happily, it will soon be the shooting season, and then, if the weather permit, he will find occupation enough in the pursuit and destruction of the partridges and pheasants: we have no grouse, or he might have been similarly occupied at this moment, instead of lying under the acacia tree pulling poor Dash's ears. But he says it is dull work shooting alone; he must have a friend or two to help him.

"Let them be tolerably decent then, Arthur," said I. The word "friend," in his mouth, makes me shudder: I know it was some of his "friends" that

induced him to stay behind me in London, and kept him away so long—indeed, from what he has unguardedly told me, or hinted from time to time, I cannot doubt that he frequently showed them my letters, to let them see how fondly his wife watched over his interests, and how keenly she regretted his absence; and that they induced him to remain week after week, and to plunge into all manner of excesses to avoid being laughed at for a wife-ridden fool, and, perhaps, to show how far he could venture to go without danger of shaking the fond creature's devoted attachment. It is a hateful idea, but I cannot believe it is a false one.

"Well," replied he, "I thought of Lord Lowborough for one; but there is no possibility of getting him without his better half, our mutual friend, Annabella; so we must ask them both. You're not afraid of her, are you, Helen?" he asked, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"Of course not," I answered: "why should I?—And who besides?"

"Hargrave for one—he will be glad to come, though his own place is so near, for he has little enough land of his own to shoot over, and we can extend our depredations into it, if we like;—and he is thoroughly respectable, you know, Helen, quite a lady's man:—and I think Grimsby for another: he's a decent, quiet fellow enough—you'll not object to Grimsby?"

"I hate him: but, however, if you wish it, I'll try to endure his presence for a while."

"All a prejudice, Helen—a mere woman's antipathy."

"No; I have solid grounds for my dislike. And is that all?"

"Why, yes, I think so. Hattersley will be too busy billing and cooing with his bride to have much time to spare for guns and dogs, at present," he replied. And

that reminds me, that I have had several letters from Milicent since her marriage, and that she either is, or pretends to be, quite reconciled to her lot. She professes to have discovered numberless virtues and perfections in her husband, some of which, I fear, less partial eyes would fail to distinguish, though they sought them carefully with tears; and now that she is accustomed to his loud voice, and abrupt, uncourteous manners, she affirms she finds no difficulty in loving him as a wife should do, and begs I will burn that letter wherein she spoke so unadvisedly against him. So that I trust she may yet be happy; but, if she is, it will be entirely the reward of her own goodness of heart; for had she chosen to consider herself the victim of fate, or of her mother's worldly wisdom, she might have been thoroughly miserable; and if, for duty's sake, she had not made every effort to love her husband, she would, doubtless, have hated him to the end of her days.

Chapter xxvj.

Sept. 23rd.

OUR guests arrived about three weeks ago. Lord and Lady Lowborough have now been married above eight months; and I will do the lady the credit to say that her husband is quite an altered man; his looks, his spirits, and his temper, are all perceptibly changed for the better since I last saw him. But there is room for improvement still. He is not always cheerful, nor always contented, and she often complains of his ill-humour, which, however, of all persons, she ought to be the last to accuse him of, as he never displays it against her, except for such conduct as would provoke a saint. He adores her still, and would

go to the world's end to please her. She knows her power, and she uses it too; but well knowing, that to wheedle and coax is safer than to command, she judiciously tempers her despotism with flattery and blandishments enough to make him deem himself a favoured and a happy man.

But she has a way of tormenting him, in which I am a fellow-sufferer, or might be, if I chose to regard myself as such. This is by openly, but not too glaringly, coquetting with Mr Huntingdon, who is quite willing to be her partner in the game; but I don't care for it, because, with him, I know there is nothing but personal vanity, and a mischievous desire to excite my jealousy, and, perhaps, to torment his friend; and she, no doubt, is actuated by much the same motives; only there is more of malice, and less of playfulness, in her manœuvres. It is obviously, therefore, my interest to disappoint them both, as far as I am concerned, by preserving a cheerful, undisturbed serenity throughout; and, accordingly, I endeavour to show the fullest confidence in my husband, and the greatest indifference to the arts of my attractive guest. I have never reproached the former but once, and that was for laughing at Lord Lowborough's depressed and anxious countenance one evening, when they had both been particularly provoking; and then, indeed, I said a good deal on the subject, and rebuked him sternly enough; but he only laughed, and said—

"You can feel for him, Helen—can't you?"

"I can feel for any one that is unjustly treated," I replied, "and I can feel for those that injure them too."

"Why, Helen, you are as jealous as he is!" cried he, laughing still more; and I found it impossible to convince him of his mistake. So, from that time, I have carefully refrained from any notice of the subject

whatever, and left Lord Lowborough to take care of himself. He either has not the sense or the power to follow my example, though he does try to conceal his uneasiness as well as he can; but still, it will appear in his face, and his ill-humour will peep out at intervals, though not in the expression of open resentment—they never go far enough for that. But, I confess, I do feel jealous at times—most painfully, bitterly so—when she sings and plays to him, and he hangs over the instrument, and dwells upon her voice with no affected interest; for then, I know he is really delighted, and I have no power to awaken similar fervour. I can amuse and please him with my simple songs, but not delight him thus.

28*th*.—Yesterday, we all went to the Grove, Mr Hargrave's much-neglected home. His mother frequently asks us over, that she may have the pleasure of her dear Walter's company; and this time she had invited us to a dinner-party, and got together as many of the country gentry as were within reach to meet us. The entertainment was very well got up; but I could not help thinking about the cost of it all the time. I don't like Mrs Hargrave; she is a hard, pretentious, worldly-minded woman. She has money enough to live very comfortably, if she only knew how to use it judiciously, and had taught her son to do the same; but she is ever straining to keep up appearances, with that despicable pride that shuns the semblance of poverty as of a shameful crime. She grinds her dependants, pinches her servants, and deprives even her daughters and herself of the real comforts of life, because she will not consent to yield the palm in outward show to those who have three times her wealth; and, above all, because she is determined her cherished son shall be enabled to "hold up his head with the highest gentleman in the land." This same son, I imagine, is a man of expensive

habits—no reckless spendthrift, and no abandoned sensualist, but one who likes to have "everything handsome about him," and to go to a certain length in youthful indulgences—not so much to gratify his own tastes as to maintain his reputation as a man of fashion in the world, and a respectable fellow among his own lawless companions; while he is too selfish to consider how many comforts might be obtained for his fond mother and sisters with the money he thus wastes upon himself: as long as they can contrive to make a respectable appearance once a year, when they come to town, he gives himself little concern about their private stintings and struggles at home. This is a harsh judgment to form of "dear, noble-minded, generous-hearted Walter," but I fear it is too just.

Mrs Hargrave's anxiety to make good matches for her daughters is partly the cause, and partly the result, of these errors: by making a figure in the world, and showing them off to advantage, she hopes to obtain better chances for them; and by thus living beyond her legitimate means, and lavishing so much on their brother, she renders them portionless, and makes them burdens on her hands. Poor Milicent, I fear, has already fallen a sacrifice to the manœuvrings of this mistaken mother, who congratulates herself on having so satisfactorily discharged her maternal duty, and hopes to do as well for Esther. But Esther is a child as yet—a little merry romp of fourteen: as honest-hearted, and as guileless and simple as her sister; but with a fearless spirit of her own, that I fancy her mother will find some difficulty in bending to her purposes.

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Chapter xxvij.

October 9th.

IT was on the night of the 4th, a little after tea, that Annabella had been singing and playing, with Arthur as usual at her side: she had ended her song, but still she sat at the instrument; and he stood leaning on the back of her chair, conversing in scarcely audible tones, with his face in very close proximity with hers. I looked at Lord Lowborough. He was at the other end of the room, talking with Messrs Hargrave and Grimsby; but I saw him dart towards his lady and his host a quick, impatient glance, expressive of intense disquietude, at which Grimsby smiled. Determined to interrupt the *tête-à-tête*, I rose, and, selecting a piece of music from the music-stand, stepped up to the piano, intending to ask the lady to play it; but I stood transfixed and speechless on seeing her seated there, listening, with what seemed an exultant smile on her flushed face, to his soft murmurings, with her hand quietly surrendered to his clasp. The blood rushed first to my heart, and then to my head; for there was more than this; almost at the moment of my approach, he cast a hurried glance over his shoulder towards the other occupants of the room, and then ardently pressed the unresisting hand to his lips. On raising his eyes, he beheld me, and dropped them again, confounded and dismayed. She saw me too, and confronted me with a look of hard defiance. I laid the music on the piano, and retired. I felt ill; but I did not leave the room: happily, it was getting late, and could not be long before the company dispersed. I went to the fire, and leant my head against the chimney-piece. In a minute or two, some one asked me if I felt unwell. I did not answer; indeed, at the time, I knew not what was said; but I mechanically looked up,

and saw Mr Hargrave standing beside me on the rug.

"Shall I get you a glass of wine?" said he.

"No, thank you," I replied; and, turning from him, I looked round. Lady Lowborough was beside her husband, bending over him as he sat, with her hand on his shoulder, softly talking and smiling in his face; and Arthur was at the table, turning over a book of engravings. I seated myself in the nearest chair; and Mr Hargrave, finding his services were not desired, judiciously withdrew. Shortly after, the company broke up, and, as the guests were retiring to their rooms, Arthur approached me, smiling with the utmost assurance.

"Are you very angry, Helen?" murmured he.

"This is no jest, Arthur," said I seriously, but as calmly as I could—"unless you think it a jest to lose my affection for ever."

"What! so bitter?" he exclaimed laughingly, clasping my hand between both his; but I snatched it away, in indignation—almost in disgust, for he was obviously affected with wine.

"Then I must go down on my knees," said he; and kneeling before me, with clasped hands, uplifted in mock humiliation, he continued imploringly—"Forgive me, Helen!—dear Helen, forgive me, and I'll never do it again!" and, burying his face in his handkerchief, he affected to sob aloud.

Leaving him thus employed, I took my candle, and, slipping quietly from the room, hastened upstairs as fast as I could. But he soon discovered that I had left him, and, rushing up after me, caught me in his arms, just as I had entered the chamber, and was about to shut the door in his face.

"No, no, by heaven, you shan't escape me so!" he cried. Then, alarmed at my agitation, he begged me

not to put myself in such a passion, telling me I was white in the face, and should kill myself if I did so.

"Let me go, then," I murmured; and immediately he released me—and it was well he did, for I was really in a passion. I sank into the easy-chair and endeavoured to compose myself, for I wanted to speak to him calmly. He stood beside me, but did not venture to touch me or to speak, for a few seconds; then approaching a little nearer, he dropped on one knee—not in mock humility, but to bring himself nearer my level, and leaning his hand on the arm of the chair, he began in a low voice—

"It is all nonsense, Helen—a jest, a mere nothing—not worth a thought. Will you never learn," he continued more boldly, "that you have nothing to fear from me? that I love you wholly and entirely?—or if," he added with a lurking smile, "I ever give a thought to another you may well spare it, for those fancies are here and gone like a flash of lightning, while my love for you burns on steadily, and for ever like the sun. You little exorbitant tyrant, will not that"——

"Be quiet a moment, will you, Arthur," said I, "and listen to me—and don't think I'm in a jealous fury: I am perfectly calm. Feel my hand." And I gravely extended it towards him—but closed it upon his with an energy that seemed to disprove the assertion, and made him smile. "You needn't smile, sir," said I, still tightening my grasp, and looking steadfastly on him till he almost quailed before me. "You may think it all very fine, Mr Huntingdon, to amuse yourself with rousing my jealousy; but take care you don't rouse my hate instead. And when you have once extinguished my love, you will find it no easy matter to kindle it again."

"Well, Helen, I won't repeat the offence. But I

meant nothing by it, I assure you. I had taken too much wine, and I was scarcely myself at the time."

"You often take too much wine; and that is another practice I detest." He looked up astonished at my warmth. "Yes," I continued. "I never mentioned it before, because I was ashamed to do so; but now I'll tell you that it distresses me, and may disgust me, if you go on and suffer the habit to grow upon you, as it will if you don't check it in time. But the whole system of your conduct to Lady Lowborough is not referable to wine; and this night you knew perfectly well what you were doing."

"Well, I am sorry for it," replied he, with more of sulkiness than contrition: "what more would you have?"

"You are sorry that I saw you, no doubt," I answered coldly.

"If you had not seen me," he muttered, fixing his eyes on the carpet, "it would have done no harm."

My heart felt ready to burst; but I resolutely swallowed back my emotion, and answered calmly, "You think not?"

"No," replied he boldly. "After all, what have I done? It's nothing—except as you choose to make it a subject of accusation and distress."

"What would Lord Lowborough, your friend, think, if he knew all? or what would you yourself think, if he or any other had acted the same part to me, throughout, as you have to Annabella?"

"I would blow his brains out."

"Well, then, Arthur, how can you call it nothing—an offence for which you would think yourself justified in blowing another man's brains out? Is it nothing to trifle with your friend's feelings and mine—to endeavour to steal a woman's affections from her husband—what he values more than his gold, and therefore what it is more dishonest to take? Are the marriage vows a jest;

and is it nothing to make it your sport to break them, and to tempt another to do the same? Can I love a man that does such things, and coolly maintains it is nothing?"

"You are breaking your marriage vows yourself," said he, indignantly rising and pacing to and fro. "You promised to honour and obey me, and now you attempt to hector over me, and threaten and accuse me and call me worse than a highwayman. If it were not for your situation, Helen, I would not submit to it so tamely. I won't be dictated to by a woman, though she be my wife."

"What will you do then? Will you go on till I hate you; and then accuse me of breaking my vows?"

He was silent a moment, and then replied—

"You never will hate me." Returning and resuming his former position at my feet, he repeated more vehemently—"You cannot hate me, as long as I love you."

"But how can I believe that you love me, if you continue to act in this way? Just imagine yourself in my place: would you think I loved you, if I did so? Would you believe my protestations, and honour and trust me under such circumstances?"

"The cases are different," he replied. "It is a woman's nature to be constant—to love one and one only, blindly, tenderly, and for ever—bless them, dear creatures! and you above them all—but you must have some commiseration for us, Helen; you must give us a little more license, for as Shakespeare has it—

> 'However we do praise ourselves,
> Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
> More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won
> Than women's are.'"

"Do you mean by that, that your fancies are lost to me, and won by Lady Lowborough?"

"No; Heaven is my witness that I think her mere dust and ashes in comparison with you,—and shall continue to think so, unless you drive me from you by too much severity. She is a daughter of earth; you are an angel of heaven; only be not too austere in your divinity, and remember that I am a poor, fallible mortal. Come now, Helen; won't you forgive me?" he said, gently taking my hand, and looking up with an innocent smile.

"If I do, you will repeat the offence."

"I swear by"——

"Don't swear; I'll believe your word as well as your oath. I wish I could have confidence in either."

"Try me, then, Helen: only trust and pardon me this once, and you shall see! Come, I am in hell's torments till you speak the word."

I did not speak it, but I put my hand on his shoulder and kissed his forehead, and then burst into tears. He embraced me tenderly; and we have been good friends ever since. He has been decently temperate at table, and well conducted towards Lady Lowborough. The first day, he held himself aloof from her, as far as he could without any flagrant breach of hospitality: since that, he has been friendly and civil, but nothing more—in my presence, at least, nor, I think, at any other time; for she seems haughty and displeased, and Lord Lowborough is manifestly more cheerful, and more cordial towards his host than before. But I shall be glad when they are gone, for I have so little love for Anabella that it is quite a task to be civil to her, and as she is the only woman here besides myself, we are necessarily thrown so much together. Next time Mrs Hargrave calls, I shall hail her advent as quite a relief. I have a good mind to ask Arthur's leave to invite the old lady to stay with us till our guests depart. I think I will. She will take it as a kind attention, and,

though I have little relish for her society, she will be truly welcome as a third to stand between Lady Lowborough and me.

The first time the latter and I were alone together, after that unhappy evening, was an hour or two after breakfast on the following day, when the gentlemen were gone out after the usual time spent in the writing of letters, the reading of newspapers, and desultory conversation. We sat silent for two or three minutes. She was busy with her work, and I was running over the columns of a paper from which I had extracted all the pith some twenty minutes before. It was a moment of painful embarrassment to me, and I thought it must be infinitely more so to her; but it seems I was mistaken. She was the first to speak; and, smiling with the coolest assurance, she began—

"Your husband was merry last night, Helen: is he often so?"

My blood boiled in my face; but it was better she should seem to attribute his conduct to this than to anything else.

"No," replied I, "and never will be so again, I trust."

"You gave him a curtain lecture, did you?"

"No; but I told him I disliked such conduct, and he promised me not to repeat it."

"I thought he looked rather subdued this morning," she continued; "and you, Helen; you've been weeping I see—that's our grand resource, you know—but doesn't it make your eyes smart?—and do you always find it to answer?"

"I never cry for effect; nor can I conceive how any one can."

"Well, I don't know: I never had occasion to try it; but I think if Lowborough were to commit such improprieties, I'd make him cry. I don't wonder at

your being angry, for I'm sure I'd give my husband a lesson he would not soon forget for a lighter offence than that. But then he never will do anything of the kind; for I keep him in too good order for that."

"Are you sure you don't arrogate too much of the credit to yourself? Lord Lowborough was quite as remarkable for his abstemiousness for some time before you married him, as he is now, I have heard."

"Oh, about the wine you mean—yes, he's safe enough for that. And as to looking askance to another woman—he's safe enough for that too, while I live, for he worships the very ground I tread on."

"Indeed—and are you sure you deserve it?"

"Why, as to that, I can't say: you know we're all fallible creatures, Helen; we none of us deserve to be worshipped. But are you sure your darling Huntingdon deserves all the love you give to him?"

I knew not what to answer to this. I was burning with anger; but I suppressed all outward manifestations of it, and only bit my lip and pretended to arrange my work.

"At any rate," resumed she, pursuing her advantage, "you can console yourself with the assurance that you are worthy of all the love he gives to you."

"You flatter me," said I; "but, at least, I can try to be worthy of it." And then I turned the conversation.

Chapter xxviij.

December 25th.

LAST Christmas I was a bride, with a heart overflowing with present bliss, and full of ardent hopes for the future—though not unmingled with foreboding fears. Now I am a wife: my bliss is

sobered, but not destroyed; my hopes diminished, but not departed; my fears increased, but not yet thoroughly confirmed; and, thank Heaven, I am a mother too. God has sent me a soul to educate for heaven, and given me a new and calmer bliss, and stronger hopes to comfort me.

Dec. 25th, 1823.—Another year is gone. My little Arthur lives and thrives. He is healthy but not robust, full of gentle playfulness and vivacity, already affectionate, and susceptible of passions and emotions it will be long ere he can find words to express. He has won his father's heart at last; and now my constant terror is, lest he should be ruined by that father's thoughtless indulgence. But I must beware of my own weakness too, for I never knew till now how strong are a parent's temptations to spoil an only child.

I have need of consolation in my son, for (to this silent paper I may confess it) I have but little in my husband. I love him still; and he loves me, in his own way—but oh, how different from the love I could have given, and once had hoped to receive! how little real sympathy there exists between us; how many of my thoughts and feelings are gloomily cloistered within my own mind; how much of my higher and better self is indeed unmarried—doomed either to harden and sour in the sunless shade of solitude, or to quite degenerate and fall away for lack of nutriment in this unwholesome soil! But, I repeat, I have no right to complain; only let me state the truth—some of the truth at least,—and see hereafter if any darker truths will blot these pages. We have now been full two years united—the "romance" of our attachment must be worn away. Surely I have now got down to the lowest gradation in Arthur's affection, and discovered all the evils of his nature: if there be any further change, it must be for the better, as we become still more accustomed to each

other: surely we shall not be lower down than this. And if we, I can bear it well—as well as Jesus, as I have borne it before.

Arthur is not what is commonly called a bad man: he has many good qualities: but he is a man without self-control or holy aspirations—a lover of pleasure, given up to animal enjoyments: he is not a bad husband, but his notions of matrimonial duties and comforts are not my notions. Judging from appearances, his idea of a wife is a thing to love one devotedly and to stay at home—to wait upon her husband, and amuse him and minister to his comfort in every possible way, while he chooses to stay with her; and, when he is absent, to attend to his interests, domestic or otherwise, and patiently wait his return; no matter how he may be occupied in the meantime.

Early in spring, he announced his intention of going to London: his affairs there demanded his attendance, he said, and he could refuse it no longer. He expressed his regret at having to leave me, but hoped I would amuse myself with the baby till he returned.

"But why leave me?" I said. "I can go with you: I can be ready at any time."

"You would not take that child to town?"

"Yes—why not?"

The thing was absurd: the air of the town would be certain to disagree with him, and with me as a nurse; the late hours and London habits would not suit me under such circumstances; and altogether he assured me that it would be excessively troublesome, injurious, and unsafe. I overruled his objections as well as I could, for I trembled at the thoughts of his going alone, and would sacrifice almost anything for myself, much even for my child, to prevent it; but at length he told me plainly, and somewhat testily, that he

could not do with me: he was worn out with the baby's restless nights, and must have some repose. I proposed separate apartments; but it would not do.

"The truth is, Arthur," I said at last, "you are weary of my company, and determined not to have me with you. You might as well have said so at once."

He denied it; but I immediately left the room, and flew to the nursery to hide my feelings, if I could not soothe them, there.

I was too much hurt to express any further dissatisfaction with his plans, or at all to refer to the subject again, except for the necessary arrangements concerning his departure and the conduct of affairs during his absence, till the day before he went, when I earnestly exhorted him to take care of himself and keep out of the way of temptation. He laughed at my anxiety, but assured me there was no cause for it, and promised to attend to my advice.

"I suppose it is no use asking you to fix a day for your return?" said I.

"Why, no; I hardly can, under the circumstances; but be assured, love, I shall not be long away."

"I don't wish to keep you a prisoner at home," I replied. "I should not grumble at your staying whole months away—if you can be happy so long without me—provided I knew you were safe; but I don't like the idea of your being there among your friends, as you call them."

"Pooh, pooh, you silly girl! Do you think I can't take care of myself?"

"You didn't last time.—But THIS time, Arthur," I added earnestly, "show me that you can, and teach me that I need not fear to trust you!"

He promised fair, but in such a manner as we seek to soothe a child. And did he keep his promise? No;

—and, henceforth, I can never trust his word. Bitter, bitter confession! Tears blind me while I write. It was early in March that he went, and he did not return till July. This time he did not trouble himself to make excuses as before, and his letters were less frequent, and shorter, and less affectionate, especially after the first few weeks: they came slower and slower, and more terse and careless every time. But still, when I omitted writing he complained of my neglect. When I wrote sternly and coldly, as I confess I frequently did at the last, he blamed my harshness, and said it was enough to scare him from his home; when I tried mild persuasion, he was a little more gentle in his replies, and promised to return; but I had learnt, at last, to disregard his promises.

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Chapter xxix.

THOSE were four miserable months, alternating between intense anxiety, despair, and indignation; pity for him, and pity for myself. And yet, through all, I was not wholly comfortless; I had my darling, sinless, inoffensive little one to console me, but even this consolation was embittered by the constantly recurring thought, "How shall I teach him hereafter to respect his father, and yet to avoid his example?"

But I remembered that I had brought all these afflictions in a manner, wilfully, upon myself; and I determined to bear them without a murmur. At the same time I resolved not to give myself up to misery for the transgressions of another, and endeavoured to divert myself as much as I could; and besides the companionship of my child, and my dear, faithful

Rachel, who evidently guessed my sorrows and felt for them, though she was too discreet to allude to them,—I had my books and pencil, my domestic affairs, and the welfare and comfort of Arthur's poor tenants and labourers to attend to; and I sometimes sought and obtained amusement in the company of my young friend Esther Hargrave: occasionally I rode over to see her, and once or twice I had her to spend the day with me at the manor. Mrs Hargrave did not visit London that season; having no daughter to marry, she thought it as well to stay at home and economise; and, for a wonder, Walter came down to join her in the beginning of June and stayed till near the close of August.

The first time I saw him was on a sweet, warm evening, when I was sauntering in the park with little Arthur and Rachel, who is head-nurse and lady's-maid in one—for, with my secluded life and tolerably active habits, I require but little attendance, and as she had nursed me and coveted to nurse my child, and was moreover so very trustworthy, I preferred committing the important charge to her, with a young nursery-maid under her directions, to engaging any one else: besides, it saves money; and since I have made acquaintance with Arthur's affairs, I have learnt to regard that as no trifling recommendation; for, by my own desire, nearly the whole of the income of my fortune is devoted, for years to come, to the paying off of his debts, and the money he contrives to squander away in London is incomprehensible.—But to return to Mr Hargrave:—I was standing with Rachel beside the water, amusing the laughing baby in her arms with a twig of willow laden with golden catkins, when, greatly to my surprise, he entered the park, mounted on his costly black hunter, and crossed over the grass to meet me. He saluted me with a very fine compliment, delicately worded, and modestly delivered withal, which he had doubtless con-

cocted as he rode along. He told me he had brought a message from his mother, who, as he was riding that way, had desired him to call at the manor and beg the pleasure of my company to a friendly family dinner to-morrow.

"There is no one to meet but ourselves," said he; "but Esther is very anxious to see you; and my mother fears you will feel solitary in this great house so much alone, and wishes she could persuade you to give her the pleasure of your company more frequently, and make yourself at home in our more humble dwelling, till Mr Huntingdon's return shall render this a little more conducive to your comfort."

"She is very kind," I answered, "but I am not alone, you see;—and those, whose time is fully occupied, seldom complain of solitude."

"Will you not come to-morrow, then? She will be sadly disappointed if you refuse."

I did not relish being thus compassionated for my loneliness; but, however, I promised to come.

"What a sweet evening this is!" observed he, looking round upon the sunny park, with its imposing swell and slope, its placid water, and majestic clumps of trees. "And what a paradise you live in!"

"It is a lovely evening," answered I; and I sighed to think how little I had felt its loveliness, and how little of a paradise sweet Grassdale was to me—how still less to the voluntary exile from its scenes. Whether Mr Hargrave divined my thoughts, I cannot tell, but with a half-hesitating, sympathising seriousness of tone and manner, he asked if I had lately heard from Mr Huntingdon.

"Not lately," I replied.

"I thought not," he muttered, as if to himself, looking thoughtfully on the ground.

"Are you not lately returned from London?" I asked.

"Only yesterday."

"And did you see him there?"

"Yes—I saw him."

"Was he well?"

"Yes—that is," said he, with increasing hesitation and an appearance of suppressed indignation, "he was as well as—as he deserved to be, but under circumstances I should have deemed incredible for a man so favoured as he is." He here looked up and pointed the sentence with a serious bow to me. I suppose my face was crimson.

"Pardon me, Mrs Huntingdon," he continued, "but I cannot suppress my indignation when I behold such infatuated blindness and perversion of taste;—but, perhaps you are not aware"—— He paused.

"I am aware of nothing, sir—except that he delays his coming longer than I expected; and if, at present, he prefers the society of his friends to that of his wife, and the dissipations of the town to the quiet of country life, I suppose I have those friends to thank for it. Their tastes and occupations are similar to his, and I don't see why his conduct should awaken either their indignation or surprise."

"You wrong me cruelly," answered he. "I have shared but little of Mr Huntingdon's society for the last few weeks; and as for his tastes and occupations, they are quite beyond me—lonely wanderer as I am. Where I have but sipped and tasted, he drains the cup to the dregs; and if ever for a moment I have sought to drown the voice of reflection in madness and folly, or if I have wasted too much of my time and talents among reckless and dissipated companions, God knows I would gladly renounce them entirely and for ever, if I had but half the blessings that man so thanklessly casts behind his back—but half the inducements to virtue and domestic orderly habits that he despises—but such a

home, and such a partner to share it! It is infamous!" he muttered, between his teeth. "And don't think, Mrs Huntingdon," he added aloud, "that I could be guilty of inciting him to persevere in his present pursuits: on the contrary, I have remonstrated with him again and again, I have frequently expressed my surprise at his conduct, and reminded him of his duties and his privileges—but to no purpose; he only"——

"Enough, Mr Hargrave; you ought to be aware that whatever my husband's faults may be, it can only aggravate the evil for me to hear them from a stranger's lips."

"Am I then a stranger?" said he in a sorrowful tone. "I am your nearest neighbour, your son's godfather, and your husband's friend; may I not be yours also?"

"Intimate acquaintance must precede real friendship; I know but little of you, Mr Hargrave, except from report."

"Have you then forgotten the six or seven weeks I spent under your roof last autumn? I have not forgotten them. And I know enough of you, Mrs Huntingdon, to think that your husband is the most enviable man in the world, and I should be the next if you would deem me worthy of your friendship."

"If you knew more of me, you would not think it, or if you did you would not say it, and expect me to be flattered by the compliment."

I stepped backward as I spoke. He saw that I wished the conversation to end; and immediately taking the hint, he gravely bowed, wished me good evening, and turned his horse towards the road. He appeared grieved and hurt at my unkind reception of his sympathising overtures. I was not sure that I had done right in speaking so harshly to him; but at the time, I had felt irritated—almost insulted by his conduct; it seemed

at if he was presuming upon the absence and neglect of my husband, and insinuating even more than the truth against him.

Rachel had moved on, during our conversation, to some yards' distance. He rode up to her, and asked to see the child. He took it carefully into his arms, looked upon it with an almost paternal smile, and I heard him say, as I approached—

"And this, too, he has forsaken!"

He then tenderly kissed it, and restored it to the gratified nurse.

"Are you fond of children, Mr Hargrave?" said I, a little softened towards him.

"Not in general," he replied, "but that is such a sweet child, and so like its mother," he added in a lower tone.

"You are mistaken there; it is its father it resembles."

"Am I not right, nurse?" said he, appealing to Rachel.

"I think, sir, there's a bit of both," she replied.

He departed; and Rachel pronounced him a very nice gentleman. I had still my doubts on the subject.

In the course of the following six weeks, I met him several times, but always, save once, in company with his mother, or his sister, or both. When I called on them, he always happened to be at home, and, when they called on me, it was always he that drove them over in the phaeton. His mother, evidently, was quite delighted with his dutiful attentions, and newly-acquired domestic habits.

The time that I met him alone was on a bright, but not oppressively hot, day, in the beginning of July: I had taken little Arthur into the wood that skirts the park, and there seated him on the moss-cushioned roots of an old oak; and, having gathered a handful of

bluebells and wild roses, I was kneeling before him, and presenting them, one by one, to the grasp of his tiny fingers; enjoying the heavenly beauty of the flowers, through the medium of his smiling eyes; forgetting, for the moment, all my cares, laughing at his gleeful laughter, and delighting myself with his delight, —when a shadow suddenly eclipsed the little space of sunshine on the grass before us; and looking up, I beheld Walter Hargrave standing and gazing upon us.

"Excuse me, Mrs Huntingdon," said he, "but I was spellbound; I had neither the power to come forward, and interrupt you, nor to withdraw from the contemplation of such a scene. How vigorous my little godson grows! and how merry he is this morning!" He approached the child, and stooped to take his hand; but, on seeing that his caresses were likely to produce tears and lamentations, instead of a reciprocation of friendly demonstrations, he prudently drew back.

"What a pleasure and comfort that little creature must be to you, Mrs Huntingdon!" he observed, with a touch of sadness in his intonation, as he admiringly contemplated the infant.

"It is," replied I; and then I asked after his mother and sister.

He politely answered my inquiries, and then returned again to the subject I wished to avoid; though with a degree of timidity that witnessed his fear to offend.

"You have not heard from Huntingdon lately?" he said.

"Not this week," I replied. Not this three weeks, I might have said.

"I had a letter from him this morning. I wish it were such a one as I could show to his lady." He half drew from his waistcoat pocket a letter with

Arthur's still-beloved hand on the address, scowled at it, and put it back again, adding—"But he tells me he is about to return next week."

"He tells me so every time he writes."

"Indeed!—Well, it is like him. But to me he always avowed it his intention to stay till the present month."

It struck me like a blow, this proof of premeditated transgression and systematic disregard of truth.

"It is only of a piece with the rest of his conduct," observed Mr Hargrave, thoughtfully regarding me, and reading, I suppose, my feelings in my face.

"Then he is really coming next week?" said I, after a pause.

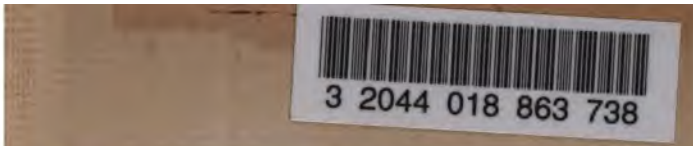
"You may rely upon it, if the assurance can give you any pleasure. And is it possible, Mrs Huntingdon, that you can rejoice at his return?" he exclaimed, attentively perusing my features again.

"Of course, Mr Hargrave; is he not my husband?"

"Oh, Huntingdon; you know not what you slight!" he passionately murmured.

I took up my baby, and, wishing him good morning, departed to indulge my thoughts unscrutinised, within the sanctum of my home.

And was I glad? Yes, delighted; though I was angered by Arthur's conduct, and though I felt that he had wronged me, and was determined he should feel it too.



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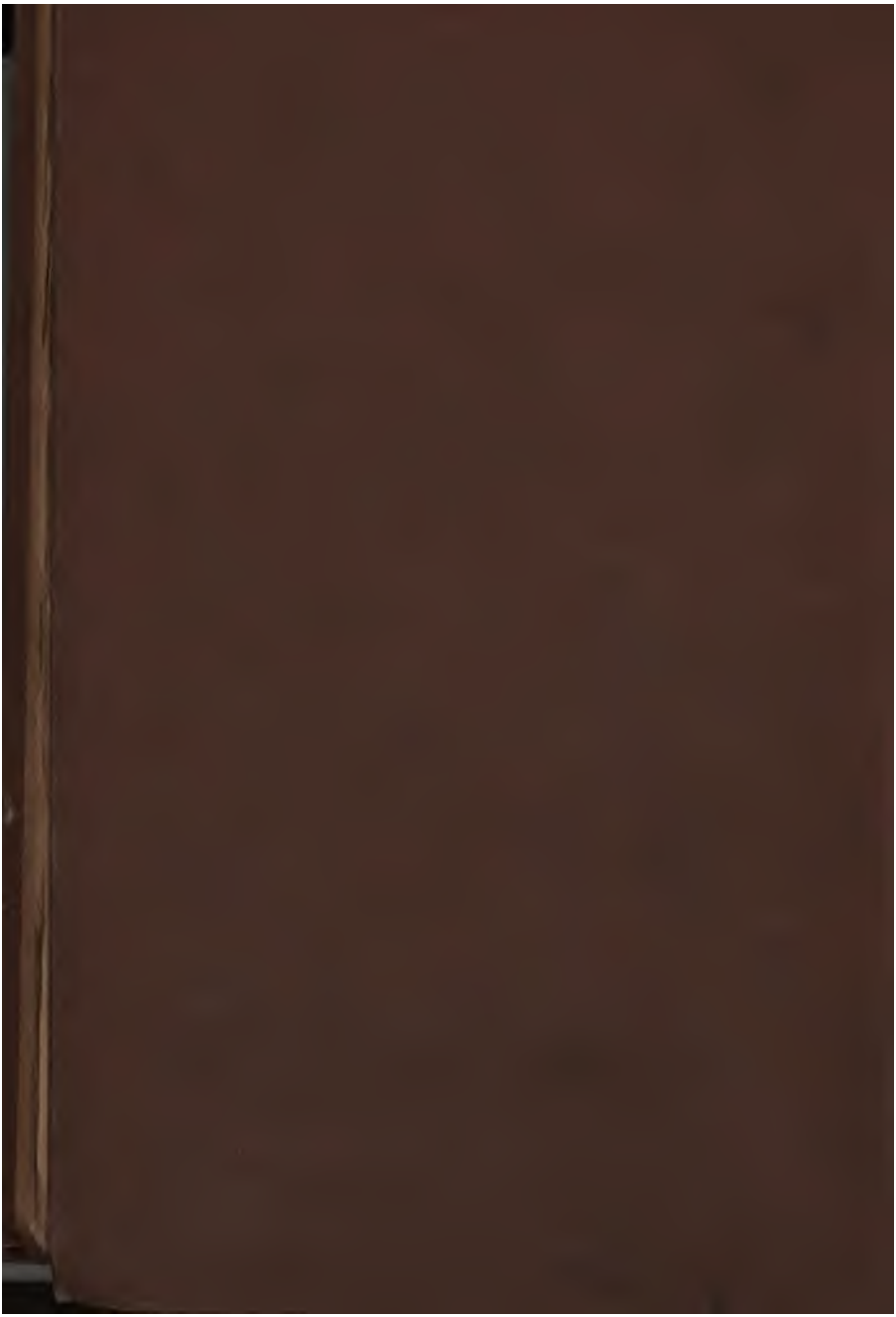
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